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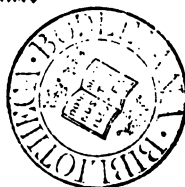
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LADY WEDDERBURN'S WISH.



LADY WEDDERBURN'S WISH.

A Tale of the Crimean War.



By JAMES GRANT,

AUTHOR OF "THE ROMANCE OF WAR," "FIRST LOVE AND LAST LOVE,"
"THE GIRL HE MARRIED," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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LADY WEDDERBURN'S WISH.

CHAPTER I.

IN BARRACKS AGAIN.

"As I informed you by telegraph, Wedderburn, we embark on the 5th—so you have a fortnight to get your outfit for the East, to see all your old flames in Rochester and Brompton, to practise the use of the revolver at the Spur Battery, and every other little art of war or peace that may be turned to useful account in the land for which we are bound."

It was Sir Edward Elton, the Lieutenant-Colonel of the Fusileers, who spoke laughingly to Cyril, when the latter in uniform, with sword and sash on, reported himself in due form at Chatham Barracks, as having joined from leave, three days after his departure from Willowdean.

In the prime of life and manhood, Sir Edward looked every inch a soldier. Fully six feet in height, his strong and lithe figure had endured,

without being impaired, the snows of Canada and the fierce hot sun of India: but his coal-black hair was becoming grizzled now. His dark hazel eyes were keen, but calm and resolute in expression, as those of one born to command; and his voice was full, deep, and rolling, though apt to become husky after he had "handled" the regiment throughout a long field-day on the Lines or elsewhere. He was the beau ideal of what a British officer and a thorough English gentleman ought to be; and had seen some sharp service in the East Indies, when with Pollock's Brigade in Afghanistan. He was thrice wounded on the banks of the Sutledge, and was nearly finished off by a thrust from a Sikh lance at the battle of Aliwal.

"You'll find all our fellows pretty much the same as you left them," he resumed; "Probyn as keen at billiards as ever; Bingham always in a scrape with some enterprising maid, wife, or widow; Pat Beamish always late for parade, breakfasting on seltzer and curaçoa, with a wet towel round his head, and the major giving, as usual, his song of 'The girl I left behind me,' to the last few who linger at the mess-table."

"He may sing that song with full effect, ere long," replied Cyril, laughing at the Colonel's enumeration of a few regimental peculiarities.

“ We shall have work enough and to spare in getting all ready by the 5th of the month ; the baggage must be reduced to the smallest possible compass, and all we don't require, must be left, like the poor women and children, with the depôt. I am glad to say that the regiment is in the highest order and discipline, and able, thank God ! to face more than its own strength of any troops in the world.”

Elton's eye kindled as he spoke, for he was intensely proud of his regiment, the noblest qualities of which he had carefully fostered and developed ; and perhaps no finer body than these Royal Fusileers existed in the service of the Queen, being all picked men, and in their ranks the three countries of the Empire were pretty equally represented ; if there was any preponderance it was in favour of England, and among them were more “ Good-conducting men,” than almost any other corps could produce.

“ I shall see you this evening at mess, I presume. This is our last night there ; to-morrow it is to be broken up. There is no parade this afternoon, save for the juniors and recruits ; so I would advise you to fill up a spare hour in going over the company's accounts and so forth.”

And, as the Colonel concluded, he once more turned to the “ Register of Services,” one of the

thirteen great books which are kept in every regiment of Infantry.

Cyril shook his hand, quitted the orderly room, and once more found himself in the sunlighted barrack square, where squads of recruits are for ever marching to and fro, with or without rifles, practising the balance-step, or swinging the clubs or the dumb-bells, and mechanically he took his way to his old rooms, on the tree-shaded and somewhat gloomy old brick terrace which overlooks the parade-ground.

Though his quarters as a captain—one small apartment and a still smaller bed closet, their walls covered with mean and dingy paper of the cheapest material—were quite familiar to him, their poverty of aspect, the small and coarsely-glazed window that faced the blank brick wall enclosing St. Mary's Hospital, the lowness of the ceiling, the ugly wooden beam which crossed it and was covered with ten thousand indentations made with a poker (the usual mode then of summoning one's servant from his den above) together with the meagre and rickety furniture obtained on hire from some exorbitant Jew, all impressed him unfavourably, fresh as he was from the luxury and splendour of his own home at Willow-dean.

He tossed his sword and crimson sash on the table with a sigh, and opened his blue surtout with its gold shoulderscales—the most handsome

undress ever worn by the Line—as if he was choking from want of air.

Was it not a dream that since he had last stood there, matters were so changed between him and Mary Lennox; that he had indeed lost her, and should never hear again the voice that found so soft an echo in his heart?

He had received no explanation from her of that obnoxious episode, the visit to Chesterhaugh; he had asked none, nor, perhaps, would he have listened to any in the mood of mind he was then. Yet he was not without a lingering hope that she *might* write to him in some fashion; and so the craving to hear from her, or of her, combated fiercely with the sterner resolve to pluck from his heart the memory of her image, and all that she had been. It was so difficult—so bitter a conviction to entertain, that all was indeed over between him and Mary Lennox! But he had never told her where his regiment lay, a singular omission, and in her sequestered home among the Lammermuirs, she knew none who could inform her, even if her little pride of heart would have permitted her to write. She, like him, longed and looked for letters; but did so in vain. None were exchanged, so disappointment and mistrust grew fast between these two, who had hitherto loved so tenderly.

While in this mood of mind, Cyril Wedderburn

had no desire for the tame monotony of overhauling his pay-sergeant's books, and seeing that Private Jones had been duly credited or debited the sum of ninepence; that Private Brown's stoppage repaid the expense of the shako and ball-tuft he had lost in a row on St. Patrick's day; that Private Smith's clearances had been paid to his wife when her last baby was born, and *not* to the clamorous canteen-keeper; and that all the messing, clothing, and accoutrements of ninety odd non-commissioned officers and men, were right and regular.

But as idleness was impossible, he took his new-bought revolver-pistols, and went forth to the Spur Battery to practise in the dry ditch, at sundry imaginary Russians. Even of that he wearied, for in the ditch were already some thirty or forty noisy, happy, and heedless subalterns—boys fresh from Sandhurst or Eton, and chiefly ensigns of the Provisional Battalion, all cracking away to each other's peril with their revolvers, and emulous in their pistol practice; and so, while numbers of his brother officers, with whom he was an especial favourite, were searching for him at his quarters, the mess-room, and all about the barracks, he was leaning over the lofty summit of the glacis, gazing dreamily at the old familiar scene, which spread far down below him like a map.

He saw the fertile plains of Kent, steeped in

the light of the noon-day sun, stretching far away till lost in hazy distance ; the village of Rainham, and all the windmills that studded the green slopes ; the sleepy Medway with all its man-o'-war hulks and freight of lesser craft, winding between its banks ; bustling Chatham, its streets full of red-coats ; the great square stone block of Rochester Castle, and the tower of the Cathedral, both rising from amid a sea of sunny vapour, half in light and half in sombre shadow ; and immediately beneath the lofty bastion was the gloomier feature of the scene—the Military Cemetery, where lie the bones of a vast army—of the thousands who have escaped the battle and the pest, in every clime where our drums have beaten, and who have come home invalided at last, worn out by wounds and with constitutions broken, only to die in Fort Pitt, and fated neither to see home or kind, or to enjoy the hard-won pittance named in mockery a pension, but to find an obscure grave under the brow of the great Spur Battery.

Cyril looked long and thoughtfully over this scene so familiar to his eyes, while those sounds so incessant in the adjacent streets of barrack, the drum, the bugle, and often the shrill Scottish pipe, were perpetually ringing in air, announcing orders, parades, or dinners, and so forth ; and he marvelled in his heart how he and all those in whom he had an interest, and for

whom he had a love, might be situated, ere that day twelvemonths came round ; for now war had been declared, and the sword was drawn ; already the combined fleets of France and Britain lay before the Russian harbour of Odessa, and none knew what an hour might bring forth.

CHAPTER II.

THE LAST NIGHT AT MESS.

"WELCOME back, Wedderburn! Eastward Ho! is now the *cri de guerre*!" exclaimed the cheerful voice of Probyn—always known as Jack Probyn—when Cyril entered the mess-room of the Fusiliers, just as the last notes of the fife and drum, playing the "Roast Beef of Old England," died away on the Terrace without, and most of his brother officers accorded him a hearty reception as he passed along to his place. It was flattering to find that he was so much a favourite, and on his mind there flashed the thought, could Mary but have seen it!

It was the last day of the Regimental Mess—for the morrow was to see it broken up, and those who had met together at the same board so long and so happily, dining as best they might in their own quarters or at hotels. Thus it was not without something of melancholy interest, for the casualties of war had to be encountered before once again those silver trophies glittered

on the table ; and of all the happy, heedless, and handsome young fellows who sat there now, who might be present at the next festal meeting ? How many might be under a foreign sod, or mutilated and pining forgotten, upon half pay.

God alone could tell. Soldiers are not much given to reflection luckily, and probably few thought on the subject.

The mess-room was far from being an elegant one, for in Chatham Barracks even moderate comfort cannot be found ; then how much less, elegance ! It was long, narrow, and somewhat low in the ceiling. Dingy red curtains draped the windows, and a few oil portraits decorated the walls. These were the property of the regiment, being likenesses of some of its colonels who had either been favourites with the Fusileers of past times, or were eminent in military history, such as George Lord Dartmouth, who demolished Tangiers, and whose breast-plate and black wig belonged to the days of the Revolution ; the Great Earl of Orkney, who commanded the corps at Steinkirk and the Siege of Athlone, and whose squinting Countess was the mistress of him of "the pious, glorious, and immortal memory." And there was fiery little Lord Tyrawley, in whose days, when the regiment was hunting Rob Roy in the Highlands, it was named the South British Fusileers to distinguish it from the 21st, who still retain

their remarkably ugly cognomen of North British Fusileers.

The furniture was very plain; at one end stood a table covered by a red cloth, whereon lay the current literature of the mess, to wit: Army Lists, Racing Calendars, Peerages, the "Queen's Regulations," "Field Exercise for the Infantry," and various newspapers, the corners of which had been appropriated for lighting cigars when matches ran short; but what the room itself lacked in elegance, was amply made up for by the splendour of the long table, on each side of which sat some thirty officers all in full uniform, richly laced, with crimson sashes and glittering epaulettes, for in those days the free and easy mode of dining in shell-jackets and open vests, had not as yet crept into the service.

They were all men of a good style and more than creditable appearance; there was not a sub in the regiment, and very few of the captains, but could ride, row, shoot or fence, handle a cricket-bat, a billiard-cue, or single-stick with any man; and, as the old commandant said, at the farewell inspection, "They were a splendid set of officers, and such as England only could produce."

The mess-plate, the long accumulation of years, was indeed magnificent; and on the tall centre-piece, the chased epergnes, the massive

goblets and salvers, large as shields, were graven the trophies and mottoes of the Fusileers—the Rose of England, the Garter and the Crown, with all their battles from the capture of Martinique to the field of Toulouse. Nor were softer luxuries omitted; on this, the last day, the mess-man had done his best, and thus roses, carnations, and geraniums from neighbouring conservatories were not wanting to enhance the decorations of the table; and the ice to cool the champagne was cut in square blocks of crystalline brightness, hollowed out to receive the bottles, when placed in the costlier coolers of gold and silver, carved and embossed.

The Colonel, Sir Edward Elton, was in the chair; Pomfret, the junior Lieutenant present—the corps had then *no* Ensigns—was Vice-President. The former wore his Cross of the Bath, and save a few who had Indian medals, he was the only man decorated there; for the veterans of Walcheren and Egypt, the Peninsula and Waterloo, had long since become as traditions in the ranks.

Ten liveried servants, whose close shorn hair and stiffness of bearing showed them to be soldiers, were in attendance, and amid the buzz of conversation, half-drowned by the crash of the band, playing certain airs from *Lucrezia* and *Fidelio* on the Terrace outside, Cyril heard dreamily the voices with which he had been so

long familiar; of his kindest friend, Major Singleton, an old soldier who had suffered many disappointments in his time (as what old soldier has not?) and who, having little save his pay, would have retired but that war had broken out; of Jack Probyn, arguing with the Doctor about a billiard match; Pat Beamish, with his rich Irish brogue, quizzing Bingham, captain of the first company, about some girl with whom he had been flirting furiously about three o'clock that morning; and all the frivolous chatter and banter inseparable from the conversation of thoughtless young men who meet thrice daily at least—once at dinner and twice on parade.

But now after Cyril had related the story of his adventure with the horse, very briefly, for a rumour of it had reached the regiment, the usual light topics became diversified by others of a graver nature; the crowded state of the garrison; the preparations for war by land and sea; the chances of promotion and staff appointments; which regiments had sailed already, and what other corps were going; was Odessa to be the base of operations, or some port in the Black Sea? Bets were taken in favour of Odessa, and lost in the end. The merits of the general officers, the probable formation of the brigades and divisions, and the supposed plans of the campaign, were all discussed pell-mell with the beauty of certain

dancers and opera singers, the points of dogs and horses, quarrels and grievances, and the girls at the Rochester Balls, where the same set of pretty faces appeared weekly, and as Beamish said, "regularly tore one's epaulettes to rags by the vigour with which they held on while waltzing."

"I'll trouble you for a slice of that turkey, Wedderburn," said Probyn.

"With pleasure, old fellow," replied Cyril, starting from his waking dream; "a little of the stuffing?"

"Thanks—did you see this morning's Gazette?"

"No—anything important?"

"Only the names of a few fellows who are appointed to serve on the staff of the proposed Turkish Contingent."

"Any one we know?" asked Major Singleton.

"Bedad," struck in Beamish, with a flash in his dark blue Irish eyes, "there's a fellow going out with the rank of major that is as big a blackguard as ever was drummed out of the Belem Rangers."

"Rather strong language, Beamish!" said Sir Edward Elton, with a smile, but a tone of reproof.

"Not a bit too strong for the occasion, Colonel," urged Beamish.

"Is it Ralph Rooke Chesters you mean?" asked Probyn.

"The same," resumed Beamish, while Cyril felt his heart throb painfully; "he was once in a Lancer corps, but proved a mighty deal too sharp for the mess at cards, and so had to sell out to avoid a court-martial; and now here is the fellow going to the East with the rank of major, bad luck to him!"

"That comes of having swell friends at headquarters," said Probyn.

"But it is only local rank," added some one disparagingly.

"True for you," grumbled Pat, dragging at his big black whiskers; "but it *is* rank there anyhow, and it is small pleasure I'd have in taking orders from Rooke Chesters on an outlying picquet, or in front of the enemy——Champagne, waiter! By-the-bye, Wedderburn, you'll have to call out Pomfret."

"Why, what has poor Pomfret been doing?" asked Cyril, looking at the smiling and rosy cheeked subaltern, who was fresh from Sandhurst.

"Doing? By Jove, he's been going ahead at an awful pace at the bandstand and the Rochester Balls with an old flame of yours, Miss——"

"Exactly—I know," said Cyril, nervously interrupting the name.

"The Canterbury girl who worked you an elegant cigar case."

"Pomfret is welcome," said Cyril, wearily, for the name of Chesters had put a finishing stroke upon his secret annoyance. In spite of the light-heartedness of those about him and the all-inspiring subject of the coming war, Cyril felt low in spirits, dissatisfied and unhappy, and the more champagne he imbibed, the more dull he seemed to become.

His old friend Singleton observed this; but instead of rallying him as he might have done, he said in a low voice—

"You seemed livelier before you left us on leave, Wedderburn—pardon me, but what is wrong with you?"

"Can't say, Major—but I do feel out of sorts."

"Out of spirits, rather—no little bit of white muslin in the matter, is there? Hah! I am right—that glitter and half closing of the eye—and the sudden pink in the cheek, tell me all about it. Well—if you have no engagement to-night, come to my quarters after the mess breaks up, and we shall have a little friendly chat over a quiet glass of grog and a devilled bone. Are you game for that?"

"Thanks—I am at your service, Singleton."

"Never think of annoyances, or run after them," said Beamish. "Cyril, like creditors,

duns, and the devil, by the Powers, they'll find you out soon enough!"

"Going to the ball to-night, Beamish?" lisped Meredyth Pomfret, the junior lieutenant, save Ramornie.

"Where is the ball, my little man?"

"At the Dockyard Superintendent's. The whole of the staff, a swell set, will be there—some pretty girls too, Beamish."

"And could I venture among that lot in white muslin and tulle—I, an unprotected man?" replied Beamish, who was a black whiskered and square shouldered Irishman, with a deep Kerry brogue; "and on the eve of marching for foreign service too, would it be fair to break any more of the darlings' hearts? No—no; that cruelty I leave to such fellows as you, Pomfret and Wedderburn."

"Foreign service—and so it has come to that again!" said a married officer who was the Colonel's guest, and there was a tinge of thoughtful regret in his tone.

"Well, Joyce, bedad it's a power sight better than being camped at the Curragh of Kildare, or protecting Peelers and process-servers in Tipperary, or hunting for whisky stills (God bless them!) in the Bog of Allen, when the mist lies thick on the Slievebloom Mountains."

On this day Cyril had some food afforded him for speculating or reflecting, if not on

human affairs in general, on the mutability of human love in particular. When returning from the Spur Battery in the afternoon, he had passed a handsome carriage bowling on the way past St. Mary's guard-house, towards the green Lines and the beautiful village of Gillingham. A pretty brunette in a white crape bonnet peeped forth for an instant. Cyril would remember—oh, how well!—the time when the sight of that equipage, its horses, harness, and livery, had made his heart leap, and now he barely accorded to its occupant a salute with his forage-cap. Yet he could recall vows that seemed now to have been traced in water or written on sand, and the flood of joy her smile once poured through his heart had subsided for ever! How the thought of her had been the first in the morning and the last in the night! How many an hour had he rambled and ridden, danced and lingered with her; and how often had he met her amid the woods of Cobham, the green leafy lanes of Gillingham and Rainham! How he had showered gloves, bouquets, music, and gifts more precious still upon her; loving her and clinging to her, though he knew that before this Hamilton of the Scots Royals, Musgrave of the Marines, and Sutton of the Artillery, had flirted with her, and carried on the same agreeable but perilous game! Yet he hoped that she loved really at last, and loved *him* better than any one;

but the quizzing of the mess had saved him. She was beautiful, yet she had been talked of then in his hearing as "a knowing hand—an old stager—up to trap," and so on; and the warning drum, when it beat for the march after the *route* came, dissolved the spell, so others had succeeded him, and now it was on "Pomfret of ours." His idol had taken to bird-liming the unfledged ensigns and second-lieutenants; and she, so loved and petted by him once, was less even than a friend now—a mere bowing acquaintance. How strange to think it was so, after all that had been!

How often is much of this great game of life played out *unseen*, amid a crowded drawing-room, at the jovial dinner-table, at the social fire-side, by hearts that seem to break, "yet breakingly live on," while sentiment wars and struggles in vain, for in the end time soothes all things!

How much, how dear, how close to his soul was that woman once? Alas, how little now—less, we have said, than a bowing acquaintance!

Would his love for Mary Lennox share a similar fate? Perhaps, so—time alone could show.

As this was the last night of the mess, until long after the drums had beaten tattoo in the great echoing square; long after the subalterns of the day had collected the final reports of the

present, the absent, and the tipsy ; the last bugle had warned "lights and fires out," and silence and darkness gathered over the roofs where so many thousand soldiers were sleeping, that so long were to be in the tented field, the officers of the Fusileers and a few of their guests lingered at table as if loth to separate ; but ultimately, leaving a few who were bent on "making a night of it," or a morning rather, Cyril and Beamish adjourned to the quarters of Major Singleton, to have a little quiet supper, the "devilled bone," &c., which had already preceded them from the mess-house.

CHAPTER III.

CONFIDENCES.

"BOTHER this garrison order about 'lights and fires out' by tattoo! here's my fellow actually extinguished the stair-lamp," said the Major, as they stumbled up the old wooden staircase which led to his quarters. "Where are you, Beamish?"

"Behind you, in the dark, Major—in the dark, bedad, like a Protestant Bishop, as we say in Kerry."

Singleton soon found the keys of his rooms at the back of the staircase window-shutter, the place where such are frequently deposited in Chatham and other barracks, and they soon found themselves in his quarters, where, by the application of the poker to the dormant beam above, he summoned his servant down.

"Now then, Bob, look alive, and let us have supper double quick!"

Bob Dacres had relinquished his white livery coat and aiguillette on leaving the mess; but he

still retained his yellow plush inexpressibles, white stockings, and buckled shoes. They consorted oddly with an old regimental coat, having white worsted wings—a garment which he had donned for kitchen-work.

The fire was stirred up in the small, meagre grate furnished by her Majesty's Ordnance Department; four candles were lighted, two on the table where the supper was laid, and two more stuck in quart bottles on the mantelpiece, gave the Major's sitting-room a cheerful aspect, though it was minus carpet or curtains, and its furniture was of the plainest description, being the mere barrack allowance; to wit, a couple of Windsor chairs of hard wood, a table of the same material, a set of fire-irons, a cast-metal coal-box, with three field-pieces engraven thereon between the letters V.R. and B.O.; a pair of bellows, and a black iron candlestick. These elegant pieces of furniture, together with a few iron-bound baggage trunks that had been all round the world, completed the comforts and appurtenances of the Major's room, unless we add a couple of regulation swords and undress and dress belts, with a double-barrelled gun and brace of horse-pistols that hung in a corner, and a wooden box of cigars that stood on the mantelshelf, "pro bono publico," as he said, for Conyers Singleton was a plain soldier of the old school, contenting himself with little, and always re-

solved to make the most and best of everything. He rarely or never wore "mufti," and when he did it was quite out of the mode.

He had a grave, almost sad face at times, with a remarkably soft expression of eye; and it was currently supposed in the regiment that a shadow or a sorrow must have rested on some portion of his earlier life; at least, all knew that prior to his joining the Fusileers he had been long a prisoner of war in India, and had thereby lost his chances of promotion. "There is no example of human beauty more perfectly picturesque than a very handsome man of middle age—not even the same man when in his youth," according to one of our fair novelists: and these words fully applied to the Major, who, though past the prime of life, was still a man of fine and commanding appearance. His features were noble, and slightly aquiline, and his thick, wavy hair, once a rich dark brown, was fast becoming grey and grizzled now; but his hazel eyes were as clear and bright as when a boy ensign he carried the colours of his regiment fearlessly up the corpse-strewn glaxis of Ghuznee, though *seven* reliefs had been shot under them in succession.

He had seen much service in other corps, but was an especial favourite with the Fusileers.

The supper, which consisted of something better than the promised "devilled bone," was

soon discussed; the Major's servant was dismissed to his roost upstairs, and amid a cloud of soothing Cavendish, the trio proceeded to make themselves completely comfortable.

"This is jolly!" exclaimed Beamish, as he tossed aside his sash, and threw open his full-dress uniform.

"I have wine, if you fellows prefer it," said Singleton; "but here are brandy and some real Irish whisky; and neither will taste the worse for being in black bottles."

"The whisky, by all means, with water *pur et simple*," said Beamish, "and no adulteration of lemon or sugar—orthodox grog, that is the mark, Major, for there's never a headache in a hogs-head of it. Ah," continued Pat, while mixing his tumbler and eyeing the contents affectionately, "there is nothing on earth so true as a good glass of grog—nothing so fickle as a pretty woman!"

"Heresy!" said the Major, while Beamish heaved a mock sigh, and Cyril remained silent.

"I saw Miss—Miss What's-her-name?—you know it well enough, Wedderburn—passing in her carriage by St. Mary's Guard to the Lines to-day," resumed Beamish.

"And young Pomfret, no doubt, with her?" added Singleton. "A little fool that boy is!"

"She still looks young and beautiful, that brunette, though I have known her when younger and more beautiful ; but that was before we went to Burmah ; and, by Jove, 'tisn't yesterday I saw the big pagoda of Moulmein."

"It seems ages ago, and she's on the cards still !"

Cyril's heart beat quicker, and he coloured while they spoke, yet he scarcely knew with what emotion, as he had long ceased to care for the fair one in question.

"Don't affect to be soured with the sex, Pat," said Singleton. "Fill your glass again—it's down to zero."

"Soured ! not I ; for I am naturally kind and attentive to everything with a petticoat on."

"Even a Scotch Highlander, eh ?"

"But we had one omission to-night at mess, Singleton."

"What was it ?"

"Your invariable song, 'The girl I left behind me.' It generally comes off about one in the morning."

"But we left at twelve sharp, and I am keeping it for the marching-out day," replied the Major ; and with a twinkle in his eyes, which were fixed on Cyril, Beamish began to sing in a mock sentimental manner—

"My love is fair as Shannon's side,
And purer than its water;
But she refused to be my bride,
Though many a year I sought her.
Yet since to France I marched away,
Her letters oft remind me,
That I promised never to betray
The girl I left behind me."

"Well, Beamish," said Singleton, catching something of the other's spirit of raillery, "I hadn't the heart to sing when I saw Wedderburn looking so melancholy."

"What is amiss, Cyril? Have you made a bad book on the Epsom, or the Whittlebury Stakes for three-year-olds? Or is it some red-headed Scotch lass that you have left behind you?"

Cyril's eyes dilated and flashed; and he coloured with vexation, but attempted to laugh while raising the glass to his lips.

"You seem awfully cut up about something, and it must be a girl, Wedderburn," said the Major. "I can see that with half an eye."

Cyril's colour deepened; he was in no humour either for scrutiny or banter. But Beamish said, laughingly—

"Don't grieve so about it, or her, or whatever it is. Little more than a week must find us on the sea, and if a girl has jilted you, forget all

about it, or score it down to the bad drop that is in her, as we say in Ireland."

He winced decidedly under this unwitting home-thrust, but drained a huge rummer of brandy-and-water at a gulp, and then with a sudden burst of that communicativeness which seizes most men at times, and of which they generally repent when calm reflection comes in the morning, he exclaimed—

"I have been deceived, Singleton—deceived where I trusted; I own it, and am sick and sore at heart just now!"

"Hear that, now. Bedad! I would have sworn it!" said Beamish, in whose eyes there shone a light that was all merriment, without an atom of the commiseration for which Cyril was inclined to look.

"I have been deluded, I say, Singleton, by a girl I loved well and dearly," he resumed, with growing bitterness; "and in my heart I am constantly vowing—yes, swearing that I shall forget her; but with every futile vow her gentle face, her soft voice, and all her image—the remembered charm of her presence—come back to me clearer and more vividly than ever! Oh, what magic, what idiosyncrasy of the human heart is this!"

"By Jove! it's like a bit of Moore's melodies!" said Beamish, while Cyril coloured

deeper, with a sudden sense of his rashness in making such an admission.

"You are just what I was at your age, when a subaltern, though, luckier than I, you are now a captain," said Singleton. "I was hot-headed, generous, impulsive, and warm-hearted. Ah, what a devil of a treadmill is this work-a-day world, that it grinds both heart and soul out of us till nearly all trust in man, and too often in woman too, passes away with every scrape of our razor! How many fellows have I seen come into the service since I was first gazetted—cultivate their whiskers, and the d—d Jews!—get into debt or matrimony, sell out or go to the devil, while I have still held on, and am only a major yet, when so many of my brother-subalterns are in command of regiments, or the enjoyment of snug staff appointments!"

"But you had a singular run of ill-luck," urged Cyril—"your captivity."

"True; few, however, but myself, know exactly all that captivity cost me; and now, if you have patience to listen to an old soldier's story, I don't care if I should spend a few minutes in telling you the incidents that cast a shadow on my life for many a year—a shadow that may never pass away or melt into sunshine."

The Major paused, and after a time said—

"It is a strange, but pretty true axiom, that

‘a man is only as old as he feels ; a woman as old as she looks ;’ thus I am not so old as to be past loving, or at least remembering what it was to love and be loved in return. So listen to my story.”

And filling his glass and his meerschaum almost at the same time, Conyers Singleton related the following little narrative of his early life.

CHAPTER IV.

"THE GIRL I LEFT BEHIND ME."

"THERE was a time when hope and enthusiasm were the mainsprings of life and action with me. Alas! their places are supplied alone by memory now. No battle in the field has ever been fought without some blunder; then how much more likely is the battle of life to be full of error and mischance!

"In the year after the storming of Ghuznee, in Afghanistan (when both of you who now listen to me must have been boys at school), I found myself at home in Cheshire on sick-leave. I had been wounded by an Afghan lance, and was in comparatively feeble health; so as our way to and from India then was always round the Cape, my leave was for two years from the date of leaving head-quarters, and I was bent on enjoying it all the more that I had come home on promotion; for my corps, the **th, had been sorely cut up during Keane's operations amid the snowy mountains and deep and perilous

defiles of Afghanistan. We lost by war and disease nearly all our captains, so we, the subalterns, benefited thereby.

"My aunt, Lady Singleton (dowager to Sir Guy Singleton, a general of the old fighting days of Wellington), received me with open arms, for I was almost the only relation she possessed, and at her old place, Stoketon Moat, near Warrington, but on the Cheshire side of the Mersey, I had always found a warm welcome when I came there for school holidays in the years of my orphanage (my parents having died young), then how much more welcome was I from far away India, and the perils of the Afghan war!

"Stoketon Moat—so called, for once in Saxon times a timber house had stood there surrounded by a moat, of which not a trace can now be found, though it was said to be deep enough when Hugh d'Avranches, after Hastings, slew the whole Saxon inmates of the place, sparing not even the dogs by the hearth—was a beautiful old mansion of the later Tudor days, with heavily mullioned windows that were half-shrouded in ivy, jasmine, and clematis, through the leafy masses of which the sun at times could scarcely penetrate the little leaded hexagonal panes, the upper rows whereof were emblazoned with the armorial bearings of the Singletons for many a generation, back even to Geoffrey Singleton, one of the

two knights who represented Cheshire in Parliament in the reign of Henry VIII., who curtailed so greatly the absurd privileges of the county-palatine of Chester.

"The old house stood on an eminence overlooking the sweep made by the Mersey towards Run-corn: it was surrounded by fine old oaks, massive cedars, and dark yews, and the vista through these, as seen from its front, was terminated by the green hill that is crowned by the old ruined castle of Halton.

"Aunt Singleton was of a cheerful disposition, thus Stoketon Moat was seldom without visitors; and on this occasion she had residing with her three handsome and lovely girls, the youngest seventeen, the oldest barely twenty, whose presence spread a new and bright charm to me about the quaint old house.

"Isabel, Lyla, and Katie Vane, were unusually attractive girls; their beauty was great and of the most refined and delicate cast; but the eldest proved the most charming to me. She was twenty now, and I had not seen her for four years before, when an incipient boyish and girlish flirtation had sprung up between us—a flirtation that with our somewhat maturer years was to take a more solid and lasting form amid the seclusion of Stoketon Moat, and the opportunities afforded by its woods and fields, green lanes, and leafy privacy.

"I was an object of interest now, to be flattered, coddled, and petted—pale, and with my recent wound yet green, and yet with all the glories of Keane's campaign to talk about!

"Thus my rival, her admirer Riversdale, had no chance when compared with me, though he was a very pleasant and good-looking young fellow. A doctor of the Royal Staff corps, Robert Riversdale was home on leave of absence like myself, but from America. It seemed to me that Isabel's blue eyes were always seeking mine, and that every glance we exchanged was half-complimentary and wholly caressing. They were glances of mute and secret intelligence, that we alone felt and understood.

"Riversdale's family lived in the neighbourhood of Stoketon Moat; they were wealthy, thus he was everyway an eligible suitor, and had been a kind of privileged dangler after the Vanes for a short time prior to my arrival. He had driven and ridden with them to see all the sights in the county; but his attentions were in no way decided, nor was his preference marked, until my decided admiration for Isabel, seemed as a spur alike to his jealousy and love.

"However, her residence in my aunt's house, our daily, almost hourly intercourse—the vast charm of propinquity, and the chances afforded by it—gave me every advantage over Riversdale; and after the snuff-coloured Bengalee girls,

and the dreamy, tawny, and affected Eurasians or Indo-Britons, with whom we were compelled at times to associate when up country, the pure and soft English beauty of Isabel Vane, together with her sweetness of disposition, and a certain piquant playfulness of manner, were so pleasing, that, within a week after my return to the Moat, I was fondly in love with her—madly, I may say, as I never did things by halves in those days.

“I was scarcely aware of the strength or depth of the passion that was growing up in my heart, until one day, when my aunt said—

“‘Why is it, Conyers, that your talk to me is for ever of Bella Vane? You are never weary of extolling her accomplishments——’

“‘But she has so many, aunt!’

“‘Her graceful style of conversation, her elegance of figure, her beauty, and so forth; do you love her, Conyers?’

“‘Yes, dear Aunt Singleton,’ said I, blushing like the boy I had been, rather than the man I was.

“‘Then tell her so, Conyers, and God bless you; for Bella, I know, will make a kind and loving wife to the man who is happy enough to win her.’

“My heart leaped within me, and my blood seem to course with renewed force through every vein, as Lady Singleton spoke thus, for already

ideas of marrying, of being the actual proprietor, possessor, and protector of a girl so charming, came with her words.

"Well, encouraged thus, my declaration—fully expected, no doubt, by foregone conclusions—and her acceptance came about successfully in the usual fashion, or what I suppose to be such, for I never loved before, and have never loved since.

"In a leafy lane, where the purple plum, the golden apple, and the damson trees entwined their branches overhead, excluding the sun from the thick rank grass below, and where the wild honeysuckle and flowers by the wayside, filled the air with fragrance, as we rode slowly together, side by side, on a summer afternoon, it all came to pass somehow.

"We were long of turning our horses' heads homeward, and the house-bell had summoned us thrice to dinner, ere I lifted her from her saddle with a caressing tenderness and an emotion of delight such as had never before thrilled through me, for we were engaged now; she was my own Isabel, and to be the wife of my heart, before we sailed together for India.

"We were rallied by the laughing Lyla and the golden-haired Katie, about our delay and return at so late an hour; and we must have had self-conscious or tell-tale faces, for the girls were not long in discovering our great secret; and even

Riversdale, who unluckily dined with us that day, detected quickly enough on Isabel's *engaged* finger, a ring which he knew well to be mine, for it was conspicuous enough to him, as he stood by her side to turn the music leaves, as she seated herself at the piano in the drawing-room, where usually music became the order of the evening.

"I, too, was near, and could detect the flush that mounted to his temples when his eyes fell on the ring, and how the words of compliment or flattery he was about to whisper in her half-averted ear, died away unuttered on his lips.

"He was too well-bred to question her, or make the least remark upon the subject; but pleading an after-dinner engagement, took his leave soon after; and I was weak enough to feel some triumph at being master of the position, and that the girl he admired so much and loved in secret, was mine—and mine for ever.

"For ever? Alas, could I then have foreseen the future!

"Three months afterwards the bells rang a merry wedding chime in the old church of War-rington, when Isabel and I knelt at the altar, and were declared 'man and wife' by the white haired rector; and seldom, perhaps, has the sun shone through the quaint stained glass of those ancient windows on a lovelier bride than mine,

or on two sweeter girls than Lyla and Katie, in their clouds of snowy tulle, as they knelt, sobbing, of course, behind her.

"A brother officer was to have been groomsman, but an accident detained him, and by an odd chance or fatality, his post was occupied by Robert Riversdale, who acquitted himself to the satisfaction of all—the six bridesmaids in particular, for very striking the fellow looked in his rich staff uniform; though I fancied that his voice faltered when he congratulated me, and he turned deadly pale, as he kissed the cheek of Isabel; but I could forgive him these little weaknesses *then*; and as if to show that he had no secret repining at my success, he presented her with a magnificent suite of jewels, diamonds and opals set in gold and blue enamel—a suite an empress might have worn; and that evening saw us off to seclude ourselves in Wales, until the honeymoon waned.

"As our carriage drove away from the Moat, and I drew down the blinds and embraced her, caressing her head on my shoulder, 'Oh Isabel!' I exclaimed; 'my own Isabel—at last we are married and one!'

"'Married for life!' she murmured with her face nestling in my neck.

"'Married for love,' I added.

"'Yes, but for life, dearest Conyers—for life, too—and the life beyond, if such can be!' she

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added with an energy that haunted me even as her words did, when our dark and sorrowful future came.

"I shall never forget the delight of those remembered days—for they are but a memory now—the blissful days I spent with Isabel, amid the green vales, the frowning cliffs and soaring peaks of the old principality; in lonely places where the wild goat, his long beard waving in the wind, leaped from crag to crag, rousing the golden eagle in his giddy eyrie; or by secluded pools and mountain tarns, where the brown otter would rise suddenly to the surface, and, with a spotted trout between his teeth, vanish as quickly to his hole among the rank green sedges. 'The world forgetting, by the world forgot,' at least for a period, we spent it in a calm of joy and tenderness, till Lady Singleton began to weary for us, and urged our return to Stoketon, as I could spend but six months more in England, and would have to report myself at the *Depôt Battalion* in Chatham, whither Isabel was of course to accompany me.

"How well I can yet recal our long Welsh ramble, the flat vale of the Teifi and the old church of St. David's; the gloomy pass of Llanberis; Craig Ceffyl, where the Welsh made their last brave stand against the 'Ruthless King;' the lovely vale of Llangollen with all its luxuriant greenness and fertility—for we were never weary

of wandering, and were full of love and enthusiasm for each other and for everything.

"I had no alloy to my happiness, not even when I found, as by chance I sometimes did, among Isabel's favourite books, a withered flower between the leaves, that had *not* been given by me, or 'To Isabel, from her friend R.R.,' pencilled on the fly-leaf, for Riversdale's hopes were gone for ever now. But if I progress thus, I fear you may find my story as weary as an old novel written in letters, than which, perhaps, I know of nothing more flat and prosy.

"After we had been some months at Stoketon, a child came to add to our happiness.

"When you see me seated here, a plain and rough old soldier, in his bare or half-furnished barrack-room—if not happy, at least content, like poor La Vallière in her convent—content to do without the luxuries and the tendernesses of life, you may think there is little of the poetry of it in me; but there *was* much of it *then*, ere sorrow, care, and unmerited misfortune came upon me.

"A new joy seemed to spread a holy light over all our little circle when the baby came. I shall never forget the tender emotions that made my heart swell tremulously and filled my eyes with a moisture akin to tears. I felt grateful to God and happy with everybody, with the old village doctor, the wrinkled and tyrannical nurse, who assumed command of the entire household;

with my benignant Aunt Singleton ; the radiant girls Lyla and Katie (exalted now to the sudden dignity of full-blown aunts), and more than all with my poor, pale darling Isabel, for to my enthusiastic mind, something of sanctity seemed to mingle with the love I bore her.

“ I felt what the childless can never feel ; now more than ever joined, as a certain writer has it, to the great community of man. Here was a little unit, that in the time to come should be a man, to live long after us, I hoped and prayed in my heart of hearts, honourably and well, beyond the years, when the sod had grown green above Isabel and me.

“ So the baby grew the wonder of all our little community at Stoketon Moat ; Aunt Singleton bestowed upon it a sponsorial silver mug, the handsomest that could be procured, and the white haired and red faced Rector gave it a name and made a little Christian of it, under the double cognomen of Guy Conyers ; the latter for me, and the former for the old General who had led his brigade so gallantly at Vittoria and Toulouse ; and so, happily passed the days till the time came when I found that I must appear in Chatham garrison, and our home was to be, thenceforward, a broken one !

“ If our baby was a hale and sturdy little fellow who throve amazingly, it was otherwise with his mamma, for Isabel made a slow recovery,

and was so weak and ailing, when the terrible time for my departure came, that by a consultation of physicians, it was impressed upon me, that she must imperatively remain at home, nor attempt to follow me to India, for perhaps six—certainly for four—months yet to come.

"This was a sad dictum to me, who knew that the transport which was to take me to the shores of Hindostan—the *Rangoon* Indiaman—was already lying opposite Tilbury Fort, taking in water and stores.

"I shall pass over our parting. It was sad, indeed; and long and frequently did I press both the pale mother and the golden-haired child to my breast, ere I tore myself away, with a whirling brain and a bursting heart.

"‘To your care I confide them, dear Aunt Singleton,’ said I, as she embraced me at the door. ‘I am going now, and perhaps may not be here again before my hair is grey and wrinkles have taken the place of dimples.’

"The overland route had not then been developed, and going to India was, to many, the affair of a lifetime. I had tried to speak in jest, but, alas! I knew not how prophetically.

"I travelled night and day until I reported myself to the Commandant, old Sir William W., and assumed the command of the men of my own regiment, that were to embark next day.

"In the hurry of our departure, I had no time

left me for a moment's reflection, luckily: and grey daybreak on the following morning saw us leave Chatham for Gravesend, five hundred strong, all drafts for various corps in India. And as we marched in the still and dewy dawn, to the air of 'The Girl I Left Behind Me,' every tap of the drums and every note of the sweet, low fifes, went keenly to my heart: for I thought of her I had left behind in Cheshire, my girl-wife, my Isabel, with our baby at her breast!

"The cheers of the heedless and unthinking boys—for the detachments were composed of little else—who were off to see the world, each with sixty rounds of ammunition at his back, and ready to face anything—Old Scratch himself if he came against them—failed to rouse either my natural spirit or my military enthusiasm; though I could remember the time, when the loud crash of the regimental band, the bright gleam of the bayonets, and the waving of the colours above nine hundred bearskin caps, with the measured tread of many feet, had kindled both when *last* I had marched to India, through the deep resounding arch of the old Picquet House, and under the guns of the great Spur Battery.

"Seven miles of dusty road brought us to Gravesend, where the *Rangoon* lay, a stately ship of eighteen hundred tons, hove short on her cable, with blue-peter flying at the foremast-head. All was confusion on board, for she was a great East

Indiaman of the old school, built alike for war and traffic, carrying twenty eighteen-pounders, and eight thirty-twos on her main and lower decks. Everybody was bustling about, and the ship was a veritable Babel. Cuddy stores, with fresh and salt provisions, were being hoisted in from lighters on one side; rusty shot and shell, as ballast, from a Woolwich tender, on the other. Casks and cases encumbered all the decks; paint, tar, beer, tobacco, gin, and bilge-water, loaded the atmosphere above and below; a drizzling rain was falling, and a thick white mist enveloped all the low flat shore; the brick bastions, the curtain and fosse of Tilbury, which is a fort as Dutch in aspect as in character, since its chief strength lies, not in defending itself by fire, but in being able to lay the surrounding district under *water*.

"More than a hundred women, sailors' wives and sweethearts, were sent noisily ashore. Our men were 'told off' to their berths speedily, and amid the noise and bustle, the voice of Isabel, her face and the baby's, came ever and anon as in a dream before me; and, with something of a sickened heart, I entered the great cabin.

"'Bravo, Singleton! How goes it, old fellow,' cried a familiar voice, and from amid a crowd of officers who were lounging and lunching about the table, some sitting, some standing, and all laughing and chatting gaily, Doctor Riversdale in his blue undress uniform, with sword and black

belt on, came forward to greet me. 'So *you* are going out in the *Rangoon*, eh !'

" ' Yes, with two hundred men from the dépôt. Are you ?'

" ' Bound for Bombay I am, to be stationed there on the staff. But—but I don't see Mrs. Singleton with you.'

" I then explained, and my voice faltered as I spoke of her, that her health did not, as yet, permit her to accompany me to India. I know not now the words of Riversdale's reply ; but the spirit of it impressed me with the idea that her absence proved rather a relief to him. To avoid talking of Isabel, even to my late rival, was impossible. He seemed to like the theme, and perhaps felt a grim satisfaction in the idea that she and I were to be separated for a time.

" The voyage passed over pleasantly enough. At St. Helena, at the Cape, and with several homeward-bound ships, we left letters for those we had left behind us—those we loved, and hoped, if spared by war and disease, to meet again. And the month of December saw us with our various regiments in the army of Sir Hugh Gough, advancing from Agra against the Mah-rattas engaged in that war, which was incident to the quarrel about the occupation of Cutch, all of which, however, has nothing to do with my story, save that I was a unit in the army destined to

annex the principality of Scinde to the British Crown.

On the 29th of December we crossed the Chumbal (a river which flows through Central India, from the Vendhya mountains to the Jumna) without loss or much trouble, and had just halted and piled arms to have a little tiffin, when the mails from Europe overtook us, and I got a letter from Isabel, the first I had received since leaving her and home, an event that seemed now to have happened ages ago.

"She was getting slowly better, and hoped to rejoin me soon—at least, to be in Bombay, awaiting the conclusion of the war in Scinde. My eyes suffused painfully, and my heart beat wildly, as I read on; for though petty and trivial to others, situated as I was then, all that followed was dear indeed to me, for it was about our little Guy Conyers. He was growing *such* a baby, *such* a love as never was seen or heard of since babies were first invented! His nose was fast resembling mine (I remembered it a most unpromising mine (I remembered it a most unpromising button), and he had such a pretty pouting mouth, just like Katie's; his eyes were already noticing, and often smiled from his berceau-nette at things other people couldn't see; but they were *such* eyes! How he crowed and laughed, and bit the nurse's finger with his toothless gums; and would persist in kicking off the woollen bootikins Aunt Katie had knitted for

him, and his little pink feet seemed more comfortable without them!

"How I devoured all this. I who once upon a time thought all babies most stupidly alike, deuced bores and nuisances, to be avoided and shunned in all trains and steamers. And so while I read on, the picture of Isabel, with her downcast eyes and long lashes, turned to this particular and most wonderful baby, crowing on her knee, or nestling in her tender bosom, came vividly and fondly before my mental eye, till I was roused from my dream of home by the bugles sounding 'fall in,' and the voice of Sir Hugh's senior aide-de-camp saying to the Colonel as he rode past,—

"'The enemy are in front. Please get the battalion formed. Her Majesty's 39th will commence the attack—the 56th Native Infantry to support: stand to your arms!'

"I placed the letter in my breast pocket, drew my sword, and, with a sigh, joined my company.

"I need not detail at any length the battle of Maharajpore, though it proved a fatal field to me.

"The British were fourteen thousand strong, with forty guns; but the Mahrattas, a fierce and warlike race, trained to arms from their earliest years, mustered twenty-one thousand, horse and foot, with one hundred pieces of cannon.

"Under a terrible fire, which, in the end, killed and wounded seven hundred and ninety of our officers and men, we rushed upon them; the old 39th, or Dorsetshire—*Primus in Indus*, as their colours have it—in the van, and the 56th Bengal Infantry supporting them well and gallantly, soon drove the foe from their guns, bayoneting the gholandazees on every hand.

"Rallying in the village, the Mahrattas again showed front, and fought with blind fury. There the Gwalior troops, after discharging their long matchlocks right into our faces, flung them down, and, like the Scots Highlanders of old, charged us sword in hand, with target up and head stooped behind it. With frantic desperation they fell, like a herd of wild tigers, upon our regiment; and the whole of my company got mingled with them in a confused *mêlée*, opposing their bayonets or clubbed muskets to the keen trenchant blades of the Indians, who were ultimately routed, with the loss of four thousand men, and all their beautiful cannon save *one*, which they carried off the field, and to which I was fastened by a rope, a mutilated and manacled prisoner of war!

"The catastrophe happened thus:—

"Amid the terrible *mêlée* in front of the village, and just when Major Stopford and Captain Codrington, of the 40th Regiment, fell before the very muzzles of the Mahratta cannon, the aspect

of the enemy was wild and imposing, and I shall never forget it. Their shrill, mad yells mingled with the cheers of the British, and added to the general roar of the conflict; while their flowing garments, and turbans of every brilliant colour, scarlet, yellow, crimson, blue, and white, studded with precious stones and embroidered with gold, made their excited masses seem gorgeous as a vast field of flowers. Large round shields covered with brass bosses protected their breasts, and over these we saw their swarthy faces, their shining eyes, and crooked sabres, that flashed and glittered in the sunshine. Personally, they were all powerful men, and their strength and activity were only equalled by their recklessness of life and ferocity of purpose.

“Save me! save me, Singleton, for the love of God!” cried a voice; and dismounted, with his horse shot under him, his bare head (for he had lost his cap), exposed to twenty uplifted sabres, I saw Doctor Riversdale lying among their feet; and I did save him, by a superhuman effort, at the head of twenty determined men. But as we fell back, keeping our bayonets at the charge, a volley of grape and canister shot, from their last and only gun, swept away the twenty brave fellows who adhered to me. I fell among the enemy alone, was cut down by a tulwar, and dragged to the rear of the village.

“I fainted from loss of blood, and on re-

covering, found myself many miles away from the corpse-strewn village of Maharajpore, and in the hands of a Mahratta chief and a few of his men, now outlaws and fugitives among the mountains ; for their army had broken and fled, totally defeated and irretrievably scattered."

CHAPTER V.

THE MAJOR'S STORY CONCLUDED.

"My limbs were stiff and sore, for I was still bound to the cannon, which was a nine-pounder fieldpiece.

"The chief, Ali Khan, whose whim it was to keep me prisoner instead of cutting me to pieces, was an outlaw now ; several regiments of Gough's army, both infantry and cavalry were sent into the country of the Mahrattas at the expense of the Gwalior Government, to enforce peace and order ; so he, with his followers, were compelled to lurk among the mountains in the north-west of Scinde.

"There were times when I repined bitterly, and thought that but for Riversdale's presence in front of the village, when he ought to have been in the rear of the attacking column looking after the wounded, I should not have made that desperate onslaught to rescue him, and so been *taken* myself !

"Alas ! you see that my story, unlike most

others, begins with a happy marriage instead of *ending* with it, as most novels do, and all comedies at the fall of the curtain.

"Like most, if not nearly all the Mahratta troops, the followers of Ali Khan were cavalry, hardy and ferocious fellows. Their only arms were swords, spears, and matchlocks, like those used in the wars of Cromwell; their only equipage, blankets and horse-cloths. With these slight incumbrances they easily rode fifty miles a day, feeding their horses on whatever they would eat; whether it was the ripe corn growing in the fields or the dry thatched roofs of a village, was all the same to the Mahrattas of Ali Khan, who was a stern and unyielding warrior, vain of real or supposed descent from Sevajee, the founder of the old Mahratta empire.

"*En route* he carried off several children, and I now learned for the first time that his people were fond of possessing slaves, and hence their capture of me.

"Over miles upon miles of a flat country covered with wild bushes, and many more of desert sand, they fled from Maharajpore, till we entered upon a district studded by almost impervious thickets and tamarisk shrubs which also entwine their branches; and beyond this desolate region we reached the mountains that look down on Western Scinde, where they halted, encamped, and lurked for several weeks to rest and heal

their wounds, subsisting the while by forays and the plunder they carried off in their march. Sometimes Ali Khan made the neighbourhood too hot to hold him ; and then, by a swift movement, he would favour other regions, perhaps in Beloochistan, with a short residence ; but he generally preferred to hover in the hills to the north of Tattah, which are barren and totally uninhabited, so that we were often compelled to plunder for food, almost to the gates of Brahminabad, its ancient capital.

“ Chained to that accursed gun, my sole sleeping-place being between its wheels at night, exposed to the dews with only a horse-rug to cover me (while the Mahrattas lived in tents), exposed to the risks of being helplessly strangled by Thugs, devoured by tigers or jackals, or being bitten by serpents such as the terrible Braminee cobra, stung by insects all day, and having the disgusting green bugs among my matted locks and beard by night—chained to the gun, I say, like Ixion on his wheel in the Infernal Regions, I thought—oh, how deeply and desperately—of her I loved, of my home, of free and pleasant England, far, far away ; of Stoketon Moat and Cheshire with all its shady woods, its lakes and meres ; its parks of emerald green, its shady lanes and hedgerows ; of the broad Mersey winding to the sea ; of budding spring and glorious summer, brown autumn, with its golden harvest fields and

crisp foliage, and jolly winter, with its snow on hill and wold, its green bays and scarlet berries in church-porch and in hall.

"Changes like these I had none !

"It was a period of horror, weariness, and despair—a despair that was black and hopeless, and daily, with a sickened heart, I surveyed the arid plains on one hand and the barren mountains of Tattah on the other, hoping against hope for some rescue or relief, and in this slavery more than a year passed away, without an event save an occasional buffalo hunt, when hides were wanted for shields or harness, (as the Mahrattas cared not for the beef), or an occasional *kutha*, a popular amusement of the tribe, when recitations and songs are given by professional musicians or story-tellers ; and frequently I heard them sing of the battle of Maharajpore, and how the great Sahib-log, Ellenborough Bahadour, had been amid the thickest of the conflict, mounted on a snow-white elephant, in the howdah of which I had certainly seen his lordship freely exposing himself to the risks of shot and shell.

"My sabre wound had been allowed to heal as Nature chose, and after hemorrhage ceased it closed rapidly ; but unluckily for myself, by the skilful and tender manner in which I bound up a bayonet-stab received by Ali Khan, the Mahrattas conceived that I was a doctor, and hence kept

me closely secured to the gun, to frustrate any attempt to escape.

"Isabel's letter was found upon my person, and conceived to be some great medical secret; the ink lines were carefully washed off the paper, and the dilution swallowed on speculation by Ali Khan and his favourite wife; but I had many cures to perform, many cuts and stabs and bullet-holes to probe and patch and bind, with the terror of death hanging over me if I failed, or a patient fevered or died; but luckily for me the Mah-rattas were all Hindus, extremely temperate in what they ate or drank, so I was pretty successful in my practice, and earned the goodwill of all, particularly that of the women of the tribe, who were as hardy and as muscular as the men, and regularly shared every labour with them save that of fighting; but it was long before I succeeded in convincing them that I was *not* a doctor, and by that time I was so weary of existence, as to care little whether they shot me, to save further feeding or trouble.

"Released but at rare intervals, and even then always closely watched, I had been *five* years chained to the gun, when it was abandoned in a deep *nullah* as a useless incumbrance. I was then worn to bone and brawn; but I had lost all heart and hope. Heaven knows how I had been fed, for I had been treated often like a dog—a creature of the lowest caste.

"Offers of ransom I had often made in vain ; and chance of rescue I had none. Neither had I any prospect of escape. I was without horse, or arms, or money, or even a knowledge of *where* I was, so devious had been our wanderings ; and at times I could not say with certainty whether we were on the confines of Beloochistan, or among the mountains of Kelat.

The Hindu religion admits of no proselytes, so I was never troubled with any attempts to convert me ; the institutes of Menou, compiled 1200 B.C., had quite settled all that, so that I was safer than if in the hands of Mohammedans, who might have compelled me to choose between the turban and the bowstring.

"And so a sixth year passed away !

"Was my Isabel living or dead ? Had she perished of a broken heart ? I tried to remember of a widow that had done so, but failed. Was our little child living now ? If so he should be verging on seven years old. Seven years old—oh my God ! I would press my hands over my eyes and strive to portray him, for I knew that the child must grow, and change with his growth ; but I could only picture him as I had seen him last, nestling in his mother's bosom.

"Then I would think with a shudder, Alas ! how long may he have been in his little grave ?

"Ever present were such thoughts as these ; of Isabel and the baby in 'the woollen bootikins'

which had been worked for it, as her last and only letter told, by Katie—little Katie, whom I remembered with her masses of golden hair; the rippling locks of which would neither keep in knot or net, but hung like an aureole, a shining glory round her smiling face.

“Kate would be four-and-twenty now, and most likely herself a mother.

“I knew that I must long, long since have been gazetted out of the service; numbered with the lost, the missing, or the dead; that another must have filled my rank and place in the regiment, where by that time my very name must be forgotten!

“And so I grieved at the thought of these things, till my heart grew sick with sorrow and grieving. Oh, how true it is, that ‘the heart knoweth its own bitterness, and a stranger intermeddleth not with its joys.’

“Times there were when I longed for death, for, as Dryden says in his ‘Don Sebastian,’ I felt keenly but bitterly that ‘Death is to man in misery, *a sleep* ;’ but in that sleep, I should have no dreams of Isabel or home.

“One day—I shall never, never forget it—these, and such sad and bitter thoughts as these, were maddening me while I was grooming the horses of Ali Khan, beautiful animals of the Candahar and Thibet breeds, and when my task was over I sat down beside a tamarisk tree, and

actually gave way to tears. We were then encamped, as I knew, not far from the Indus, in a place where a grove of peepul trees grew round a little lake beside a Hindu temple of white marble, the bronze idols in which the Mahratta women were wont to fan for hours, after smearing them with ointments, butter, and ghee.

“‘The Sahib-log (white gentleman) is always sad?’ said a voice close by me; and on looking up I saw Ali Khan, with his shield of buffalo hide slung on his back, and leaning on his long Kelat spear, while his dark gleaming eyes observed me with something of wonder and much of contempt.

“‘I have thoughts, O Khan, that make me sad,’ said I, rising and crossing my hands upon my breast.

“‘Are you not kindly used among us?’ he asked.

“‘I have certainly eaten your salt and bread; but both have been watered by the tears of misery.’

“‘Why?’

“‘I have a wife and child——’

“‘I have several wives and children too; yet were I a captive, would they cost me a tear? No. I am a man! Go—our lives are in the hands of Bramah—our doom in the hands of Kali—even yours, a creature without caste or future.’

“And turning away with stolidity and scorn,

he mounted the horse I had just saddled for him, and with his long tasselled spear in his hand, rode off on a scouting expedition—for the appearance of some Bombay cavalry in our vicinity had rendered him somewhat uneasy.

“He had scarcely left me, when I heard some shrill cries from the women of his followers who were dipping and bleaching their linen dresses in the little lake beside the peepul grove. A child had fallen into it from a rock where he had been gathering flowers; it was the deepest part of the lake, and the little creature rose twice and sank again before I stirred myself.

“‘What is it to me?’ thought I bitterly; ‘would that every Mahratta in the land were in the same perilous predicament.’

“A third time the boy rose and wildly threw up his little brown hands and arms, while his half-shriek came over the water as he vanished again. At that moment a thought of my own child flashed upon my mind, and plunging in, I dived successfully, saved and brought the little Mahratta cub to dry land; but barely in time, for some hours elapsed before I succeeded in perfectly restoring him to life and consciousness, and ere I became aware that it was Sevajee, the favourite child of Ali Khan, I had rescued from a watery grave!

With all his assumed stolidity and apparent

sternness of heart, the Mahratta chief was melted towards me now, and in a burst of gratitude he gave me my liberty !

“ ‘ Go,’ said he ; ‘ here are a swift horse, good arms, my own, and a bag of rupees. You are free to join your people. Thirty miles from this, near a temple of Seva, on the left bank of the Indus, you will find them. Go—and Brahma, Kali, and Vishnu be your guides, and may their arms overshadow you, even as those of the blessed banian tree overshadow the earth !’

“ This was the best and holiest wish a Hindu could give me, as they pay divine honours to this enormous tree.

“ You may imagine that I was not long in availing myself of the permission so suddenly given.

“ Like one in a dream, one who had suddenly shaken off a long nightmare that has been protracted to the verge of madness, I rode all that afternoon at a breathless pace, not without fears that Ali Khan might change his mind, or my horse, arms, and rupees should excite the cupidity of some of his people who might follow me ; and ere nightfall I found myself in a little flying camp formed by a battalion of the Queen’s troops (the ‘ old Springers’), and a squadron of the 1st Bombay Lancers, whose French grey uniforms, faced with white, I hailed with a shout of joy as I rode towards their videttes.

"On that day I had been exactly six years and four months a prisoner !

"On hearing my story, the officers treated me with every kindness and commiseration, and while the Lancers departed on a vain search for Ali Khan and his people, no time was lost in having me transmitted to Bombay.

"I had been returned among *the killed* at the battle of Maharajpore, and so circumstantial were the details of my having been cut down and dreadfully mangled by the Mahratta swordsmen, that I had some trouble in proving my own identity.

"The years of my captivity had seen many changes, and thus I, who had gone out by the *Rangoon*, Indiaman, round the Cape, and up the Arabian Sea, came home by the overland route, which was just being got into working order, but we crossed the desert with a caravan. So eager was I, that the six weeks of the homeward journey, with its ever-changing scenes, seemed interminable ; and telegraph, or Indian cable, there were none. I reached London well nigh destitute ; but burning with impatience for news of Isabel and home, having counted more than ever the hours since I was a free man.

"I attended the Commander-in-Chief's *levée* at the Horse Guards, where my weird and wild, or hunted aspect, excited considerable speculation among the fashionably-dressed loungers in the

ante-room. He promised to look after me promptly; but 'the Liberals were in office,' as he told me, with a peculiar and inexplicable smile; so my back pay was refused on the plea that 'the country had lost my services for six years and four months;' my progressive rank also was declined, so that I, who had been well up among the subalterns of my own corps at the battle of Maharajpore, was now, when gazetted anew, placed at the foot of twenty-four lieutenants of the Royal Fusileers.

"My wife! They could tell me nothing about her. 'Why?' I asked passionately

"'Because my rank and services did not entitle her to a pension;' so I turned on my heel with mutiny in my heart, and on my lips a bitter malison on 'the Liberals' who were in office.

"On my aunt, Lady Singleton, depended all my hopes now; so I set out for Stoketon by the first train from London.

"Already in the whirl of events my past period of love, and my marriage with Isabel Vane, had begun to seem but a tiny patch in the chequered web of my existence; but it was a spot so bright and fair, so pure and happy, that I clung to the memory of it, as being well worth ten times all my other years together.

"My heart and soul yearned for her, and as the train bounded along the London and North-Western line my mind went back to the day

when we set out from Stoketon on our joyous wedding trip to Wales, and the affectionate energy with which she insisted we were married 'for love and for life!' Would that gush of affection fill our hearts again? or was it one of those joys which have no renewal in this world of change?

"As I approached Stoketon Moat, and saw the dear old house with its clustered chimneys, its quaint oriels and deeply-mullioned windows shining in the sun, and half-hidden by dark-green ivy, flowering clematis, and fragrant jasmine, I lifted my hat, and inspired by the memory of all the terrors and hardships I had undergone, exclaimed in a low voice—

" 'My God—I thank Thee for this day!'

"Is it blasphemy—oh, I hope not—to say that I had little perhaps to be thankful for in having escaped the perils of Maharajpore, and survived my sufferings among the mountains of Tattah and Beloochistan?

"The house was occupied by strangers, who viewed me with coldness and mistrusted my appearance of agitation.

" 'Lady Singleton had died three years ago—Mr. Vane's people they knew nothing about—had never even heard of them,' I was informed by a sleek and well fed butler, who was about to close the door in my face—the door of the house that was once my home.

"‘Are any of Dr. Riversdale’s family in the neighbourhood?’ I inquired anxiously.

"Yes; the doctor has resided at his father’s house since the old gentleman died about a year ago.’

"‘Thanks,’ said I, and turned wearily away, and conscious that I was a source of vulgar speculation to the menials of the strange family now occupying what, as I have said, was once my home, I passed down the old and well-known avenue to issue out upon the highway that led to Warrington.

"Riversdale, I learned from the lodge-keeper, had retired upon half-pay, and had now an extensive practice in the neighbourhood. From him, then, I should perhaps learn all, and a few minutes’ brisk walking brought me to his villa, a handsome new house, embosomed among some fine old trees.

"‘Doctor Riversdale is always visiting his patients at this hour,’ the servant informed me; ‘but Mrs. Riversdale is at home,’ she added, ushering me into a drawing-room, the splendour of which seemed wondrous to me after my sojourn among the sordid tents of Ali Khan.

"‘I have no card,’ said I, having omitted to provide myself with such a luxury, or forgotten all about such things, ‘and the lady cannot know me: but say an old brother officer of the doctor is anxious to see her.’

"‘Why did I become a soldier?’ thought I,

while surveying the comforts of Riversdale's home, and seeing his children. I had no doubt they were his; two boys and a girl, fair-haired little things, gambolling on the lawn in the sunshine; and all the inclination for what Jean Paul Richter calls 'cottage smoke and sitting-still-comfort' came over me. Thus might mine have been merry among the Stoketon woods! Oh, the years I have lost—years of love and joy with Isabel!

"Escaping from her brothers, the little girl toddled through the drawing-room window, which opened in the French fashion down to the floor; and then impelled, I know not by what secret impulse, I drew her towards me and kissed her so tenderly on the forehead, that she shrank back abashed and eyed me dubiously, for I was tanned to almost negro blackness, had a bushy beard, together with what must have seemed to her the eyes of an ogre—the eyes of one who for fully seven years, had been daily face to face with Death!

"Just as the poor child shrunk from me, the drawing-room door opened, and there entered a lady who bowed with a well bred smile of inquiry and paused, surveying me earnestly.

"Though more matronly in form, and a trifle rounder perhaps, her face was still that of Isabel, the girl I had left behind me. Womanly and thoughtful, her eyes were as sparkling and

inquiring as of old, but animated by wonder now and inexpressible tenderness (for my aspect seemed so war-worn), till suddenly tears and terror filled them as they gazed into mine. The mouth, so exquisitely cut, was full and fine, till it quivered and blanched, while the skin of her delicate face was smooth as the lining of a white and pink shell.

"'Isabel!' I exclaimed, and opened my arms; but shrinking back, she uttered a wild cry of anguish and despair, and sank on a sofa, half fainting, and holding up her hands, deprecatingly, between herself and me. 'Touch me not,' was what her mute gesture seemed to say.

"I then perceived that she had two plain hoops upon her wedding finger.

"*Two?*

"I dared not approach, but stood bewildered as if rooted to the carpet, for now I saw it all—I saw it *all*; and that a great and terrible grief was about to come upon me!

"She was the wife of Robert Riversdale!

"We stood apart, she shrinking and I doubting. Oh! was this the meeting—this the moment—for which I had longed and yearned, and thirsted, amid the protracted misery of the years that were past? Gasping, she gazed at me, while she did so, clutching wildly the cushions of the sofa; and there was an expression of unutterable bewilderment, of keen intensity, in her eyes.

“ ‘Oh, merciful Heaven! Conyers Singleton, can this be you?’ she exclaimed, in a low voice, like a wail.

“ ‘There was no embrace between us—no gladness, but only intolerable fear in both our hearts; we did not even shake hands, and she was my wife!

“ ‘Oh, Isabel, and is it so? while I, after all those years that I have been a prisoner of war, a hunted fugitive, a wretched Christian slave, chained by the leg to a field-piece, among people whose faces and voices were to me but as those of wild animals—is it thus we meet and thus you greet me?’ I said, mournfully. ‘Isabel, what weariness of the world is in my heart—speak, or I shall fall at your feet!’

“ ‘Indeed, the room seemed to whirl round me, and I clung to the marble mantelpiece for support.

“ ‘You seem to have come back as it were from the grave to reproach me; yet, oh, Conyers! I have nothing to reproach myself with,’ she replied, speaking with great difficulty, while she placed a hand upon her heart as if to stay its wild beating, and a ghastly whiteness blanched all her beautiful face. ‘The misery of this meeting is known only to—to God and me.’

“ ‘And you have in my absence given to another your heart, your affection, which I deemed my own—for *life*, you once said?’

“ ‘Reproach me not ; all the world told me you were dead. I read the Gazette myself, and but too keenly remember, even at this hour, the agony of that in which I saw your name as among the killed: My hand, in time, was given to another.’

“ ‘To Riversdale ?’

“ ‘To Riversdale ; but my heart never—never. Oh, I shall go mad !’ She began to speak wildly and incoherently, and then added, ‘ In those dear past days I loved you and you only—oh, yes, I loved you then so dearly, so truly, Conyers !’

“ ‘And now, Isabel !’

“ ‘I love you still, dearest Conyers, but that love will turn my brain. My little child—*our* little child, Conyers,’ she added, with moving pathos in her voice and eyes, ‘ was dead ; Lyla and Katie were about to be married. I had no one to love, and no tie seemed to bind me to you, but sad, sad memory. Oh, what shall I say ? how explain myself ? A mother—a wife, and yet no wife ! Riversdale loved me before I saw you, Conyers.’

“ ‘Nay, not before your girlhood.’

“ ‘Before your return from Ghuznee ; but that pleads nothing, I am aware, for I loved you then and you only.’

“ ‘And since, Isabel—since ?’

“‘Alas! do not question me—and yet you must.’

“‘Surely some little explanation is due to me?’ said I, with the forced calmness of settled despair. ‘Oh that I had never returned from Ghuznee or learned to love you; or would to God that He had permitted me to perish at Maharajpore?’

“‘I was lonely and helpless, Conyers—oh, so lonely and helpless in my supposed widowhood,’ said she, making a great effort to speak, for voice and sense seemed alike to be failing her. ‘I respected the long-tried affection of Riversdale, which had survived even my marriage with you. He told me that he owed his life on that fatal field to you. Oh, how I mourned for you and how I loved your memory are known only to myself and *One* with whom there can be no secrets, and who knows all things! Could I help myself? and now—*now—now*,’ she exclaimed, while casting her eyes despairingly to Heaven, and striking her hands together, ‘am I to be torn from my children—his children, *his and mine*—even from the little helpless baby in its berceauvette!’

“‘Not by *me*, Isabel,’ said I, while on my aching heart those piercing words fell like drops of molten lead; ‘not by me. I shall go forth again to seek death more surely now, and cross your path no more. One kiss—only one kiss—even *he* could not refuse me that, and then

never again shall we meet on this side of the grave.'

"We both sobbed bitterly as I took one brief but passionate embrace. I laid her gently on the sofa and rang the bell, because she had fainted. Then I quitted the house of Riversdale never to enter it again!

"To me it seemed that I must be in a dream from which I should surely waken. The sun was shining in all the glory of a summer noontide on the green woodlands and greener meadows, but I felt no warmth in its rays, and my teeth chattered as I walked on, I knew not, cared not whither. So ended this terrible meeting—this interview of agony.

"I felt as one who was enveloped in the horror of a great and sudden darkness—one who had gone from the world itself, into the cold shadow of death.

"I have but little more to tell you now. Believing that I was dead, my aunt, Lady Singleton, on the death of my infant boy, bequeathed all she possessed to charitable institutions; and I cared not to dispute her will, for a few months after saw me again in India, and face to face with the hard fighting Sikhs at Chillianwallah. I strove hard to throw my life away; but it seemed to be charmed now. I never received a scratch, nor has bullet or blade been near me since the day of Maharajpore.

"A few weeks after our victory over the Sikhs, I read the death of Isabel in the *Times*, and then I knew that my interview with her, and the intolerable mental agony consequent to the falsehood of her position, had destroyed her! My poor Isabel!

"We were then on the march for Goojerat, and none of my comrades knew why in that battle, and for many a day long after it, the hilt of my sword was covered with crape—the only mourning in which I dared indulge, for the miserable fate of the girl I had left behind me."

CHAPTER VI.

THE ROUTE FOR VARNA.

UNQUESTIONABLY Cyril was unhappy in his mind about the new state of relations between himself and Mary Lennox. There were times when he thought that perhaps he had acted rashly in yielding so suddenly to the dictates of jealousy and the angry pride it engenders. He thought, too, over Singleton's remarkable story, and remembered how he had conceived the idea of a private marriage, and had even urged it upon Mary—a measure by which he must have left a young and almost unfriended bride behind him. Singleton's wife had wealth, position, and relations to rally round her, yet her fate had been a hapless one; and Cyril, as he reflected on the contingencies of war, felt somewhat consoled, that he and Mary were still free.

“Let me think of her no more—no more!” he said, mentally. “Ah, how true it is that ‘violets plucked, the sweetest showers will not

make grow again.' And now my flower of love has been crushed in its bloom !''

Fortunately for him, in the short time that intervened now before the departure of the regiment, his days were too fully occupied to leave him great room for reflection ; and the tours of duty entailed upon an officer in such a place as Chatham, even in time of peace, are incessant ; thus, if they engaged, they at the same time bored him by their continuous hard work and monotonous routine.

When not on guard or picquet, and when captain of the day, he had to make incessant inspections of the barrack-rooms, to see that the iron beds were turned up in the morning, and the ventilators open ; also before and after, and at every meal, to ascertain that the messes were in order, wholesome, and sufficient. Then came visits to the patients in hospital, the prisoners in the cells and guard-room, the children in school, for the number of each and all were to be inserted in his daily report. Then there were courts-martial and of inquiry ; committees of all kinds, mess and band ; the expenses of the last ball ; and baby-linen for soldiers' wives ; the foreign outfit for his company to be provided ; the settlement of women who were to sail, and those who were to be left behind (to starve, perhaps)—a mournful fate determined by ballot ; then came squabbles about barrack damages,

broken glass, nail holes, and candle blisters, over which barrack-sergeants groaned and quarter-masters became furious, as they were generally found in the "married corners" of the rooms, for in Cyril's corps the angles of each apartment were still appropriated in the old fashion, to the wedded couples, because experience had taught Sir Edward Elton that the motherly and domestic care of the women, when thrifty and respectable, added to the comfort of his men.

Add to all these, the arrangement of little scrapes into which Pomfret, Jack Probyn, and some of his younger comrades had fallen by "flying kites to raise the wind," as they phrased it, among the Jew usurers and money-lenders, the Shylocks of Hammond Place—fifty per cent. wretches—whose eyes, unlike those of poor Banquo, were full enough of "speculation."

He had to leave his card on several garrison belles, who had bloomed, and blushed, and faded; but by the triumph of art over nature, had bloomed and blushed again through many fruitless seasons, amid a vast number of military changes, which saw the beardless ensigns they danced with at one period, come back at another as bronzed captains or majors. Invitations were showered upon him; there were even attempts made to revive one or two dead flirtations—sickly attempts indeed, for his love-wound was still

green, and his heart was with the solitary girl at Lonewoodlee.

Besides all these little occupations, there were revolver practice in the dry ditch, pontooning at Rochester Bridge, where, under the shadow of the old Norman Castle of the Bishop of Bayeux, the Medway runs so fast, that it sometimes swept away a life or two; and escalading with storming ladders about daybreak at the walls of the Spur Battery, a dangerous style of practice, too, when the bayonets of one's mimic forlorn hope are unpleasantly close behind. As a finale, he had to get his own Crimean outfit, for which Sir John enclosed him an ample cheque: to wit, gutta-percha jack boots, waterproof cloak and cape, camp bed, ground sheets, and blankets; a canteen for two persons; lantern, basin, and bucket; bullock trunks and slings, and much more lumber, all of which he got for the small sum of eighty guineas, "dog sheep," from a Jew contractor; so one way or another, it must be acknowledged that Captain Wedderburn's hands were pretty full, and that his sword could be seldom from his side.

Thus the days were got rapidly through; but in the morning when he awoke, like a flood of gloom, his hopeless quarrel with Mary—his Mary, once so loved and petted—rushed upon him, and despite the bustle around, for many an hour his eyes and heart were far away at Willowdean and

Lonewoodlee ; and a fair face he had last seen there—Mary, tearful, trembling, and pale in her muslin dress, with her delicate neck and adorable arms—haunted him.

Torn by conflicting emotions and unstable in purpose, he had come to the merciful resolution of writing to her, when a letter was placed in his hand by the drum-major, who acted as regimental postman.

It was from his mother, Lady Wedderburn ; and after a great deal of verbosity about Gwenny—to the effect of how much and how often she spoke of *him* ; how *sad* she had looked since his departure ; a wish that Horace was safe with the Depôt (*why*, she did not add), which she hoped would be stationed in England and *not* in Scotland—she mentioned Mary Lennox, and as he read on, Cyril felt the blood rushing to his temples.

“ As for that unfortunate girl at Lonewoodlee, the popular verdict, I regret to say, is still against her. Your father alone talks in an extenuating manner, but then we all know that he is so exceedingly simple ! I am so glad that you are beyond her dangerous influence now, dearest Cyril. Only think of what would have been your fate—your future, if you had been lured into an engagement with one whom society could not have received after what has occurred.”

He crushed the cruel letter up, but after a time smoothed it out and read on.

"I hope my darling boy is now happy in his mind, and quite cured of his absurd *local* fancy ; for Mrs. M'Guffog, the minister's wife, told me that she has heard on all hands the rumour confirmed, that the visit to Chesterhaugh, of which we know, and which caused you such suffering and annoyance, was too probably not the only one."

Cyril placed his mother's letter in his desk, which he locked, and buckling on his sword with a vicious jerk, set forth to attend to his duties, so there was no letter written to poor Mary Lennox.

The mess, the great solace of barrack-life, was now broken up completely ; the splendid epergnes, trophies, and plate, either packed or "handed over" to the Dépôt ; and Cyril hailed with satisfaction the dawn of the day that was to see the Royal Fusileers off to share in the coming perils and glories of the Eastern War ; and every heart in their ranks beat high, save those, perhaps, who were leaving hearts that were swollen with sorrow behind.

The notes of the *réveille*, now low, now high and swelling, with the drowsy, softened roll of the drums, rang through the square and echoing streets of the great barrack just as the grey dawn stole in. It is an air sweet and mournful

in its cadence, and is known in the service traditionally as the Scottish Réveille, with which the English was originally played alternately ; and ere the last soft notes of it had died away, Cyril heard the pealing bugles of his own regiment sounding loudly and high the "turn out."

The brief, restless, and half-sleepless night passed away, and ere long, belted and accoutred, he yawned and shivered in the cool atmosphere of that spacious and roughly-gravelled barrack square, where, since the middle of the last century, so many hundred thousand men have been drilled and sent forth to all parts of the world ; for Chatham is our great military school — "a mighty military hell," Beamish was wont to term it.

The pale morning star was melting into the amber sunrise, but the purple shadows yet lay deep along the wooded terrace and the lower barracks. The voices of the birds were heard as they carolled merrily in the old bushes and tiny gardens before the quarters of the commandant, the staff, and other officers, when the adjutant, about half an hour after daybreak, began to form the regiment, which was in heavy marching order, in open column of companies.

The colours, borne by Pomfret and another subaltern, were in their oilskin cases ; the officers and men wore white canvas haversacks ; but Bingham and a few of the former affected smart

courier bags. The Fusileers were in complete order for service in the field ; their blankets rolled on the top of their knapsacks ; their great coats folded ; their canteens and camp-kettles strapped on ; thus their aspect was such as no soldiers had been in Chatham Barracks since Bonaparte landed from Elba.

A few of the Fusileers had been late of coming into barracks over-night ; others had undoubtedly got groggy at the rural tavern known as the Hook and Hatchet, or other places ; but not a man was absent on this auspicious morning, though some were noisy and jocular.

" Answer to your name, sir !" cried Beamish to one of his men as the roll was called.

" Faith, but it's blisterin' dry my tongue is this morning, Captain dear."

" Dry, after all you drank last night, Barney?"

" Faith, if I had drunk more, may be I wouldn't have been so thirsty this blessed morning."

" Silence !"

This was the sole rebuke for Barney's chatter, which on any other occasion would have secured him a sojourn in the guard-house.

Mounted on his fine black horse Vidette, Sir Edward Elton was in front of the line, conning over the *route*, an official document, which stated that it was " Her Majesty's will and pleasure,"

that he was to proceed to Chatham, with thirty-five officers, forty-seven sergeants and drummers, and eight hundred and twenty-eight rank and file of the Royal Fusileers, to Southampton, "there to embark for the coast of Bulgaria, on board of such tonnage as may be provided," for so the formula ran.

The officers were around him in a group, and all were chatting gaily.

"So we are bound for Bulgaria; but wherever that may be, the devil a bit of me knows," said Beamish, whose whiskers were so black that they seemed a mere continuation of his bearskin cap; "and there is small honour in being a traveller now, when all the world is rushing about by steam and rail, and fellows go to pot tigers in Bengal and lions in Africa, when their fathers were content to look after snipe in an Irish bog, or grouse in the Highlands."

"Good morning, Wedderburn," said Sir Edward, as Cyril saluted him and presented his hand; "whatever it may be at Southampton, here the wind is fair for running down the Channel. We don't go by steamer I find," he added, pointing to the great vane on the barrack-roof—an iron rifleman, the size of life, who has levelled his weapon in the wind's eye ever since the days of Waterloo.

"Well, Bingham," said one, "have you had a tender leave-taking before breakfast?"

"Breakfast!" repeated the other, twirling the tassels of his sash; "who could make one at this inhuman hour? I have had a dose of brandy-and-seltzer."

"A bad beginning," said Beamish. "I have breakfasted at the mess-house by candle-light (which made me think it supper), on devilled kidneys, fried mackerel, and a jolly glass of Sauterne, to make a man of me for the day."

"And what is that huge flask slung over your sword-belt, Pat?"

"What would it be, Wedderburn, my boy, but 'condensed sunshine'—the best condensation I know of."

"Sunshine?"

"Well—poteen. Would you like a *doch an dorroch*, out of it? *We* can understand that, though Bingham and these English fellows don't, or pretend they don't."

The light-hearted banter of the majority contrasted strongly with the gravity, even un concealed sadness, of one or two of the married officers, particularly Joyce, who but a short time before, hand in hand with his wife, had lingered beside the bed where their two children lay fast asleep and nestling in each other's arms. As he kissed them softly, the poor man's tears had dropped upon their golden hair, and then he came forth to take his place at the head of his company; but their little cherub faces, though

they haunted him for many a day and night, amid the sufferings of our army at Varna, and the perils of the Crimea, poor Joyce was fated never again to see.

And now, gnawing the brass chain of his cap, he stood on parade, tearless, but with his eyes bent wistfully on the window of the room where his children slept, and from whence their mother was watching him. He kissed his hand to her and tried even to smile, so true it is, that in the wealth of our emotions, at times we can give nothing.

Many of the married soldiers were in the same predicament, and the sobbing of the women became at times painfully audible, as they stole forward into the ranks, and held up their children to be kissed by the father who was too probably leaving them for ever; for before Sebastopol, whole companies perished, and were renewed but to perish again. "Soldiers have hearts like other men, and they share the lot of other men," says Florence Marryat. They love and leave and lose occasionally, and occasionally also they have a soft spot left wherein to keep the memory of such things; for the military profession and a careless roving life, do not necessarily render men dead to human feeling.

How often do we hear the contemptuous or careless remark, "*he* is only a private soldier;"

but thank God! our private soldiers are generally made of better stuff than those who seek to sneer at them, and no nobler or finer army ever left the British Isles, than that which landed under Lord Raglan on the shore of Bulgaria; and the letters that came from its humblest members, the mere voices from the ranks, with which the newspapers of the day soon teemed, formed a splendid example of epistolary literature, displaying inherent manliness, strong affection and fearlessness, resignation and hope; high moral and religious principles, together with a singularly graphic power for describing all they saw and felt.

"Gentlemen and soldiers of the Royal Fusileers," cried Sir Edward Elton, when the officers had fallen in, and he wheeled the battalion into line; "prior to this we have all been soldiers but in name. Now the day is coming—nay, it *has* come—when we shall be soldiers in stern earnest, with battles to fight and glory to gain. Though nine hundred strong, we are *one* in heart, my lads—one in heart, officers and men—and ready to face anything. We are of various ages—your captains and field-officers, being senior in years to most of you. Half a century hence, how many of us shall be alive? A whole century, and as surely as the sun now shines the grass will be growing over us all; but the deeds we shall achieve must be borne on the pages of

history and live for centuries after us. So comrades, while shoulder to shoulder, let us be all as brothers, and never forget that we must be ready to die with honour to the Queen we serve, and the country which gave us birth!"

To this short, but remarkable address, the regiment responded by loud cheering, and began its march at the word of command.

"Flam off!" cried the tall Drum-major, flourishing his splendid staff (which was surmounted by the Horse of Hanover in massive silver), and using the old fashioned command now almost forgotten in the service; then crash went the music of the brass band to the air of "The Girl I left behind me," while the deep, hoarse, but hearty hurrah that Englishmen can give so well, burst from the throats of the thousands of their comrades of other corps that were soon to follow, and who had assembled to watch the departure of the Fusileers. Cheering and waving their caps, they followed into the streets of Chatham.

Other troops, Infantry, Artillery, and Marines, were on the march that morning, and other bands were heard to break the stillness of the ambient air, as their music floated over the level fields of Kent, scaring the lark and the blackbird in the budding woodlands.

Soldiers always muster and march merrily, so even the usually grave faces of Singleton and Joyce, looked bright on this eventful

morning. Patrick Beamish, who was a "devil-may-care" sort of officer, and had contrived to get several Irishmen into his own company, struck up the popular marching song, and nearly eight hundred men, while waving their bearskin caps or brandishing their muskets, made the clear blue welkin ring to the merry chorus ;

" Though I bask beneath another's smile,
Her charms shall fail to bind me ;
For my heart flies back to Erin's isle,
And the girl I left behind me."

How many brave young hearts were bounding there with wild and vague ambition, with the hope of that which they could scarcely have explained ! There was, of course, the stirring novelty of departure for foreign service, to engage in a great European War after forty years of peace, and a glow swelled up in every breast as the cheers, the songs, and the music loaded the morning air, reverberating with a thousand echoes in the streets of the town through which they marched. Even Conyers Singleton, we have said, seemed to feel this proud emotion keenly—he who had marched many a time to battle, and had heard given the orders of the per-precussion times — "Gentlemen, uncased the colours—examine your *flints and priming* ;" and leaning with his hand on his horse's flank, he looked back with bright and

glistening eyes on the marching column, the flushed faces, the black Fusileer caps, the sloped arms and the fixed bayonets that flashed so keenly in the sunshine.

Among the women who saw them march there was no enthusiasm, but there were commiseration and tears for all; for none, perhaps, more than the smooth-cheeked boy ensigns, like Pomfret, in their first red-coats; or the little drummers who beat so lustily in front of the column, and the half of whose whole height, seemed a tall bearskin cap.

By rail they were soon swept away to Southampton, and that evening saw them all stowed on board the *Victoria* transport ship, and "told off" to their berths; the muskets racked; the belts and knapsacks hung on their cleats; the messes formed, the quarter-guard on duty, and silence and order prevailing through all the crowded vessel, the result of discipline, strict obedience, and military etiquette.

By sunset, the *Victoria* had been towed by a steamer below Portsmouth, where through the evening haze, loomed the great modern tower of the church which forms a landmark from the sea, the forest of masts, and the long line of ultramural fortification extending along the beach to Southsea Castle. Now, her canvas was let fall and sheeted home; the tow-line was cast off, the last connecting link with dear Old England;

a farewell cheer was exchanged ; the steamer dipped her ensign thrice, and the great transport with its human freight stood upon her own pathway, with the high lands of the Isle of Wight upon her weather-bow gleaming white and pale in the cold lustre of the clear star-light ; but the chalky Culver Cliffs, the Cove of Ventnor with all its pretty villas, and the Blackgang Chine, soon melted into the midnight sea as the transport bore down the channel before a spanking breeze.

CHAPTER VII.

THE OLD, OLD STORY.

LADY WEDDERBURN'S fond desire that Gwenny should be married to Cyril was still uppermost in her mind, and ever present in her thoughts and day-dreams, though Cyril was far away and thinking now of other things—had, perhaps, almost forgotten his cousin's existence. Thus she viewed with extreme impatience the intimacy that was ripening fast between her wealthy niece and the penniless Horace Ramornie; an intimacy which led her to fear that ere Cyril could return to Willowdean the love of the beautiful heiress, if he cared to win it, might be lost to him for ever.

In a farewell letter from Cyril, dated at Southampton, Lady Wedderburn had heard of the embarkation, and she already trembled at the idea of the many perils to come. The *Victoria* transport, with the Royal Fusileers, had sailed; and the same newspaper which announced that circumstance contained an account of the de-

struction of the *Europe* troop-ship by fire, off Cape Finisterre, with a body of the 6th Dragoons on board, when the Colonel, so many of the men, and all the horses perished.

It has been already mentioned how love for Gwenny was dawning in the heart of Horace Ramornie; how twice he had been upon the point of a declaration, but was restrained by an intuitive perception of his aunt's views. And though a secret passion was swelling up in his heart, fear of the family aims and wishes made him actually long for the expiry of his leave of absence, as a suitable excuse for quitting his uncle's house, where he had ever been welcome and always a favourite.

Gwenny was a sensitive creature; one of those who shrink from the world's rougher touch. By nature she was all gentleness, sympathy, and enthusiasm. The blue waves rolling in light, and breaking in shining ripples on the sandy beach, or thundering in white foam on the bluff coast of the Merse, where the rocks are literally alive with wild sea-fowl; the songs of the birds, so new a sound to her, as the birds of India are mostly voiceless; the perfume of flowers, a novelty too, as the most gorgeous plants of the land she had left are scentless; the balmy coolness of the spring days, the dark purple tint of the heather on the hills of Lammermuir; the songs of the sturdy peasantry, so different in cadence

from the monstrous polyglot rubbish of the dusky Hindoostanees—all served to fill her with joy and vague yearnings, in which Horace, her usual attendant or companion, was associated. For Robert Wedderburn, anticipating, perhaps the day when he should have the field to himself, was usually, to all appearance, immersed in his studies.

Horace was master of all the legendary lore of the Merse. Thus, when with Gwenny, he enlivened many a solitary ride by the tales he told her—weird ones some of them—about the witches of Auchincraw, who became cats or crows, as suited their purpose; the terrible goblin known as the Bogle of Billymire, who devoured children like shrimps; of St. Mary of Coldingham, and the Skeleton Nun who was found built in the convent wall, and the last words in whose ears had been the awful three, *Vade in pacem*. And often they rode to the deep rocky ravine and the two abrupt hills, which form the famous foreland named St. Abb's Head, from whence they could see the coast of England, stretching in the distance far away.

There an undulation in the velvet turf, and a few gray stones lying one upon another, indicate where the convent church stood in an age that is now remote indeed; a low fence of sods, a few tufts of hemlock and wild nettles tossing in the keen sea-breeze show the old burial-ground, where the dust of the Pict, the Scot, and the

Briton, mingle on the bleak verge of the giddy cliff, three hundred feet below which the ocean roars and boils, hurling the huge waves that have come unbroken from the Naze of Norway and the mouth of the Skager Rack.

There he would tell her how the church that had passed away, had been founded in gratitude to God, by the Saxon Princess Ebba (daughter of a Northumbrian prince), when escaping shipwreck there. And how, when the Danish rovers came, in the days of the Flame-bearer, the pious nuns, to save themselves from capture, cut off their own lips and noses ; which made her think of some of the barbarous tales she had heard in India.

And often Horace paused in stories such as these, bewildered by the love that filled his heart and loaded his tongue, while he gazed into the soft, inquiring, or wondering eyes of Gwenny, or admired the graceful mode in which she sat her horse.

Horace knew well that it is not every woman who looks well on horseback ; but a slender girl like Gwenny, whose spirits were light as ether, whose dark eyes were always sparkling, and whose complexion, if not brilliant, was clear, pale, and pure, looked a very Aurora in a plumed hat and riding-habit.

Those who love truly and tenderly, seem to have had no past, for love seems always a part of the present ; thus Horace felt as if he had known

Gwenny all his life, or rather to have begun a new existence by knowing her.

One day as they rode home together slowly, after having lingered at Wolf's Crag, and talked of Lucy Ashton and Edgar of Ravenswood, as if they had been real characters, rather than the shadows of a romance—

"Thank God!" exclaimed Horace, suddenly, after a pause, "that this is my last week at Wil-lowdean!"

"Why that exclamation?" she asked, with surprise.

"Because, Gwenny, I shall soon see the last day here of a love that is without—hope."

She made no further inquiry, but cast down her long lashes, for right well did Gwenny know that her young companion loved her. By one electric glance which once had passed between them, like a flash of light, she had learned it instinctively.

"Oh, Horace," said she, tremulously, though she seemed to have more courage in the matter than he. "How lonely will all these places seem to me when you are gone!"

"And how will it be with me, Gwenny, when a memory shall be all I have of you?"

The girl cast her dark eyes down again, and blushed and smiled.

"There is a poet, who says," continued Horace—

"How many meet who never yet have met,
To part too soon, but never to forget!"

So it is with you and me, Gwenny—with me, at least. Times there are when I almost wish we had never met; for never, never can I forget you, or the hours of delight we have spent together. Oh, Gwenny Wedderburn," he added, while checking her horse's bridle, and taking her hand in his own, "I love you—love you dearly; but—but, you are rich, and I so poor—and then our aunt——" He paused, and then resumed, while the girl trembled in her saddle, and was covered with confusion. "Gwenny, dare I hope that the distinction I trust to attain on service—such, at least, as may fall to the lot of a mere subaltern—may be a pledge to me—of—of—that if I live to return, I may claim your love as my reward—my recompense?"

"You have my love already, dear Horace—all that my heart can bestow," was the almost breathless response of Gwenny.

Their horses were side by side; so passing an arm round her, he drew her close to his breast, and kissed her brow and cheek. There was something wonderfully soft and loving, tender and respectful—mutely eloquent, in fact—in the manner in which Horace gathered the girl in his embrace, when words failed him, and Gwenny seemed to feel it as such. "No two declarations of love are alike, any more than two leaves on the same

tree," says a writer who has had some experience in such pleasant matters. But it was thus that the great secret, which had trembled so long on the lips and in the heart of Horace Ramornie, was shared now by her whom it most concerned.

Long did they linger on their homeward ride, these two young lovers, reiterating the old, old story that has been said or sung by others so often, and will be so, till the end of time—how much they loved, and how unutterably dear they were to each other *now*!

"But what will Aunt Wedderburn say when she hears of our engagement?" said Gwenny, after a long pause, as they entered the shady avenue which led to the house of Willowdean.

"She will learn to hate me, I fear. And yet I am her sister's only son," said Horace, sadly.

"Hate you—why?"

"As yet we shall say nothing about it, Gwenny, love," replied Horace. "Ah, it is a pity you are so rich," he added. "People could not then talk as many do; our Aunt Wedderburn would not then deem me a fortune-hunter, and I could marry you at once, and take you away with me."

"To live on your lieutenant's pay, with a share of a barrack-room, a bungalow, or a tent! Oh, cousin Horace—Horace, darling, it is very romantic, but not to be thought of," said Gwenny, laughing.

"I have thought of it often in my day-dreams."

"Yes ; but even the proverbial love in a cottage were better," she continued, looking down with a beautiful smile, and toying with her horse's mane.

"Aunt Wedderburn wishes you to marry Cyril."

"But Cyril never asked me, nor seemed to care for me, but as one to talk to and laugh with," said Gwenny, looking surprised.

"I feel that such is her wish, however ; even Robert has hinted as much."

"But let us speak of ourselves," she exclaimed, as her eyes suddenly filled with tears ; "oh, how long may this horrible war last ?"

"It is scarcely begun, so far as we are concerned, but when once shots are exchanged, Heaven alone can tell the issue. However, I may not be away from you for more than a year—perhaps," he added, with a quivering lip, for he strove to speak hopefully, though his heart misgave him.

"A year ? Good Heavens ! a whole year !" exclaimed Gwenny, ponderingly.

"Yes, Gwenny : what is a year, at most ?"

"It will be an eternity for us to look forward to, though it is so little to look *back* upon."

"True, my own Gwenny ; and when I think of looking forward to a whole year,—twelve months, fifty-two weeks, three hundred and sixty-

five days, with all their weary hours of separation——”

“And a year of such peril to you, it may be—of anxiety and terror and sorrow to me!”

“Oh, my darling—my beautiful darling, it is horrible to be separated so soon when we have just learned to love each other, and to find existence so dear and that is love is so sweet!” said Horace, with a burst of tenderness, as he assisted her to alight, and would certainly have kissed her, but for the appearance of that solemn personage Asloane, the butler, between the pillars of the peristyle.

The future life of Horace Ramornie—the life of ambition and of military glory he had hoped to live—seemed to have passed from his mind and desires. He could imagine no scene and form no scheme for the long years to come, in which Gwenny was not concerned, and in which she did not bear a part. His ambition had evaporated, and with it, for the time, his military ardour, vanity of uniform, and the “pomp and circumstance of war” seemed to have faded sorely. The joys of the mess; the glitter of the military ballroom; the splendour of the parade; the perils of the field and the chance of being even a unit in the great game about to be played by Europe in the East, were all as nothing now, when contrasted with the charm of Gwenny’s presence, her voice and her society.

Ideas of the life of splendour and display he might spend with a beautiful girl possessed of such wealth as Gwendoleyne Wedderburn, never occurred even once to single-hearted Horace. He was too young, too impassioned, too genuine in heart and impulse to be mercenary, or to love the orphan-heiress for anything save herself alone.

He felt that he could almost without a pang relinquish his old world of hope, for she had become a new world to him.

But his sword was his sole inheritance, and now duty and honour alike combined to separate them; yet as the few remaining days of his leave of absence flew past, the happy consciousness of mutual love grew stronger between him and Gwenny; though the hour of his imperative departure was viewed with an apprehension that was mixed with sadness—an intense sadness, that was all the more keen that they were compelled to conceal it from the searching eyes of Lady Wedderburn.

“If poor Horace has nothing but his pay as a lieutenant, and I love him so, why should we not be married?” thought Gwenny; “surely I have wealth enough for two—even for a dozen. Horace is a dependant, I have heard Aunt say; but what of that? Who that love as *we* do, care for riches!”

And as she thought thus, a grand scorn for

wealth curled the beautiful lip of the little proprietrix of three hundred thousand pounds in gold mohurs and rupees.

"It would be hard indeed to marry only to please Aunt Wedderburn, when I should much rather do so to please myself and dear Horace."

But that was not the time for marrying or giving in marriage. They had to content themselves by a solemn ratification of their engagement—an exchange of rings, of locks of hair and photographs—a long, long stolen embrace amid the flowers of the conservatory, and then the hour came when they were to part, to all appearance as merely affectionate friends; when they had that task to perform which is so difficult to those who are unused to the world, and are young and love tenderly—to veil their secret emotions, to smile when they would weep; when each had to conceal their great grief at parting with the other, while their passion was so new and keen in their sensitive and impulsive hearts.

But the fatal hour came, and as the carriage rolled away through the avenue with Horace just as it had done with Cyril, Gwenny felt with a sobbing emotion in her throat, and a suffocating sensation at her heart, as if the sun of her existence had set at Willowdean, and she never knew till then how much she loved him.

To her, his departure seemed the breaking of a spell—the mockery of a dreamy fancy, till ulti-

mately his vacant place at table and in the house generally, served to bring the truth home to her, that he was gone, gone perhaps for ever—Horace so loving in manner, so gentle in voice and eye—and then the tide of sorrow welled up in the girl's heart, all the more that she had none with whom to share her secret.

The memories and visions of love remained with her; but they were visions and memories only.

Meanwhile, Horace felt sensibly that, save with Gwenny, there had been far less fuss and *empressement* about his departure, than that of Cyril Wedderburn; and poor little Miss Flora M'Caw was the only one who gave free vent to her tears, which were always ready for service on a suitable occasion.

CHAPTER VIII.

DARK DAYS.

"WELL, thank Heaven, they are separated at last!" was Lady Wedderburn's mental congratulation, as she saw, but not without emotions of pity and suspicion mingled, the pale girl—her soul wrung with uncontrollable anguish—retire to her own room after the departure of Horace; but she knew not how inexpressibly dear they had become to each other, by that very separation.

In oppressive dulness the weeks succeeded each other now, for as the family were in mourning still for Uncle Wedderburn, the visitors were fewer than usual at Willowdean; and it was not until the fourth or fifth day, and when a letter arrived, dated at Chatham Barracks from Horace and addressed to his aunt, that Gwenny realized to the full the fact of his absence.

"Horace gone," thought she; "Horace (like Scott's 'Quentin Blane') so gentle-voiced and gentle-eyed, who looked like one whom all the world had frowned on, oh! what a dreary void,

what a blank her life would be now ! There were no more drives, or walks, or rides together ; no more reading together, and no more sweet companionship."

But Horace, she knew, would be sad, even as she was herself ; and who could comfort him ? and who fill her place ?

And the confidence and innocent truth of her own heart told her—*none* !

How happily the past three months had fled ! Oh ! how she missed him, and wept and sorrowed in secret for his absence from a house where no one seemed particularly to care for him ; for Robert Wedderburn was cold and selfish, hence perhaps his legal predilections ; Sir John was incessantly occupied by all the cares that take up the time of a sporting country gentleman ; by politics, county meetings, and the internal affairs of the little burgh of Willowdean, where he was viewed as a species of potentate, even by the ministers of the three Presbyterian denominations who had churches there and Christian hearers who hated each other most cordially. As for Lady Wedderburn, she had special views and wishes, that made her approve of Horace being away, though he was soon to be face to face with death and suffering.

The piano Gwenny would touch no more, for the music so powerfully reminded her of his presence and voice, as to give her absolute pain.

Her worsted work, her embroidery, her flowers and the birds she had brought from India, had all become distasteful to her; and so were her books, though these were full of passages he had marked, poor boy—for he was not much more than a boy after all; and fast fell her tears as she re-read them.

“Alone—alone! oh, I am now so much alone!” she would say.

Her engagement-ring, which, curiously enough, escaped Lady Wedderburn’s attention among the others that glittered on Gwenny’s white fingers, and which had cost poor Horace a couple of months’ pay, she was never weary of looking at, during the first few weeks of their separation; even as another sad girl was looking at her plainer—but equally, or perhaps more beloved hoop, which from its form was emblematic of something more than a mere betrothal ring.

In her separation, Gwenny had no wound to her self-love, such as that which tortured the heart of Mary Lennox; the consciousness that one of whose whole soul and thoughts she had been empress, to whom her least word was law, her smiles and glances happiness, had cast off his allegiance, was neglecting and ignoring her, and seeking to forget her as one who would disgrace him.

The joy and excitement of Gwendoleyne when letters came from Horace, and her normal con-

dition of sadness, were alike ignored by Lady Wedderburn, though the latter was viewed with some concern by good-natured, but unthinking Sir John.

"Well, Gwenny, my summer blossom, why so sad? Thinking of your Indian home and poor papa—eh?" he would ask at times, and suppose that such were her thoughts as he received no direct reply; and then his handsome sun-burned hand would caress her dark hair, which was always dressed to perfection by the skilful fingers of her ayah Zillah, the Madrassee; but she wore fewer ornaments now, for there was no one at Willowdean whose eye she cared to please.

And so the summer months stole on.

Horace was as yet at crowded and bustling Chatham, where the drills and duties were hard and incessant; and unremitting too were the departures of troops for the East, amid the cheers of the people, the crash of music, and the clangour of bells; and he knew that the time for him to go must arrive soon, for the grim fever king was thinning fast the ranks of his regiment at Varna. But never before had Horace seemed in such an affectionate mood to his aunt, and never had he written to her so many letters, so that at times she had, most unwillingly, to depute "the task" of answering them to Gwenny, the first sight of whose handwriting made Horace

start as if electrified when he received a letter in Chatham barrackyard.

"Dear Aunt Wedderburn has desired me to write in her place; she has one of her nervous headaches to-day, and neither Dr. Squills, nor Miss M'Caw with Rimmel, can make anything of her."

He could read no further, for now the bugle sounded; but Gwenny's presence seemed beside him—Gwenny in her innocent love and artless girlhood—and he became so bewildered, that as the exasperated adjutant said, "he made a mull of the whole day's drill by his blunders, by twice marching a camp colour through the centre of his company, and repeatedly throwing the whole line out!"

Attended by an old groom, Gwenny often rode to the places she and Horace had visited, and his stories of the quaint old world that was past, came back to her memory with many a sweet and pleasant association; but how dull, how lonely and valueless seemed all those places now, for he whose presence had shed a charm over them, was no longer by her side.

The evening sun setting in gold and amber clouds beyond the purple ridges of the Lammermuirs; the beautiful flowers in the garden, even those he and she had planted (the seedlings "from dear papa's house in the Choultry"), expanding under the summer warmth; the rippling grass, the

growing corn on the upland slopes, the green waves breaking in surf on the rocky shore, were all alike gloomy and discordant, for Horace was not there, and never more might be, the most terrible reflection of all! Had she but known the solitary Mary Lennox, what delightful companions they would have been, with their community of thought and wishes; for though their positions in fortune were widely different, their hopes were one.

Arrangements had been made to join Lady Ernescleugh in London during the season; but now Lady Wedderburn, on hearing from Cyril's letters and the public prints, of the disease and horrors by which, through the utter inertia of the Ministry, our splendid army was literally withering away at Varna, shrunk from the idea of leaving Willowdean for a house in town and entering into gaiety, so the family remained at home.

Though it has been truly written that "three months of a London season teach us more than six months in the country," Lady Wedderburn had no desire that her niece's mind should become so much enlightened; so even the mixed and melancholy gaieties of Edinburgh were eschewed, and young gentlemen visitors by no means encouraged. So the girl would sigh with utter weariness when visitors came who talked only of crops and cattle, or the county pack; or when the Reverend Mr. M'Guffog paid a solemn and

fussy visit, for then the conversation ran entirely on matters clerical. And thus Gwenny learned for the first time that there was a Scottish Established Church, a Dissenting Episcopal Church with bishops, a Free Kirk which had none, and other roads to heaven without number; and she heard of petty squabbles about religious forms, if the utter absence of any could be so called. The pharisees seemed the most powerful sect of all; and she would listen in vacant wonder to the discussion of affairs that seemed as incomprehensible as the difference between Parsees and Hindoos, Brahmins, Bheels and Khonds; but much less picturesque.

Summer we have said had come; the scarlet poppies and blue cornflowers studding the golden fields of the Home Farm, pleased the eyes of Gwenny more than those of Sir John, who viewed them as weeds, and a bore; and Lady Wedderburn sighed when she thought of all that might happen, and all her eldest son must face before that corn was reaped and ground, for it was evident that our army would soon take the field, and be where hard knocks were going, as the Ministry, with a stupidity, if not worse, that has few parallels in history, was only waiting for *winter* to commence the Russian campaign.

Once, peace and war had only been empty words to many a heart and household; but they had a terrible significance now.

The Turks had compelled the Russians to raise the siege of Silistria, and driven them across the Danube; our ships of war had destroyed the batteries of Sulina, a Bessarabian village at the mouth of that river; the battle of Bayazid was fought in Armenia; Bomarsund, in the Baltic, had been bombarded by land and sea, and utterly destroyed by old Sir Charles Napier; and now many new and barbarous names of places almost never heard of before became at every table and fireside at home in Great Britain familiar in the mouths of all "as household words;" and even Lady Ernescleugh wrote Lady Wedderburn, to announce that, with some friends, she was actually thinking of going to Constantinople in Everard's yacht.

"My friend Lord Cardigan's yacht has already sailed; would you care to join us?" she added; and then followed a catalogue of many events of the London season: the debts and difficulties of some, the flirtations, matches, and jiltings of others—threatened duels, for that fashion of adjusting disputes had barely gone out.

"What if Cyril saw Gwenny now, or after the lapse of some months?" thought Lady Wedderburn. "Yes, we shall go; and perhaps I may get leave for him to come back with me on 'urgent private affairs,' as so many contrive to do now. Yes—yes, I must bring my dear boy

away from that odious place before the fighting begins with us."

But Sir John was opposed to the scheme as eccentric, and so far as regarded Cyril, incompatible with honour. The yacht required complete refitting, and the plans of Lady Ernescleugh were delayed for a time.

Though an active and obstinate opponent of Lord Aberdeen's government, and one who mistrusted him personally and as a minister, Sir John gave a large dinner party to a few neighbours and local notabilities, on news coming of the surrender of Bomarsund to Napier and General Baraguay d'Hilliers, when two thousand two hundred Russians were taken prisoners; and to his guests he bitterly reviled the Ministry for their delays and utter mismanagement of the war, and the mode by which, through their previous reductions and retrenchments, they had crippled our power by land and sea, so that our very arsenals could scarcely furnish shot for the first siege trains, while the entrenching tools issued to the troops had been condemned as worthless by the Duke of Wellington in Spain forty-three years before; and in conclusion, he quoted that fine sentence of Sir William Napier, whose words are terrible in their significance and truth. "In the beginning of each war, England has to seek in blood the knowledge necessary to insure success, and, like the fiend's progress towards Eden,

her conquering course is through chaos, followed by Death!"*

"Sae that evil-minded neer-do-weel, Chesters o' Chesterhaugh, has gone to help the Turks in person," said the Baron-Bailie of Willowdean, who officiated as croupier; "think ye it is true news, Sir John?"

"Yes; he has been gazetted to a majority in the Turkish contingent," replied Sir John, laughing.

"A major o' Bashi Bozooks, whatever they be!" said the Reverend Mr. M'Guffog, lifting up his dreary eyes; "the Lord be good to us!"

"It's just what we micht hae expected o' siccan a loon, sirs," resumed the irate bailie, who, being a grocer and general dealer, ranked heavily as a creditor against Chesters; "he's mair a Turk than a Christian by nature, and will find himsel' quite at hame amang their harem-scarems, I warrant."

The mention of Chesters' name, by a direct association of ideas caused a reference to be made to the decayed Laird of Lonewoodlee, and the *esclandre* concerning his pretty daughter.

Sir John, his son, and several gentlemen who were present, were disposed to express their disbelief of the matter, or their hopes at least, that the Master of Ernescleugh had been mistaken

* "History of the Peninsular War."

on the night in question ; but the Baron-Bailie, who was a strict Sabbatarian, and vehement expounder in public on religion and morality, and who naturally took the worst views of human nature, maintained that "the young leddy had doubtless gude reasons o' her ain for her mysterious visits to such a man ; and evil or no evil, there was aye some water found where the stirkie droons," a Scottish proverb which is supposed to infer a vast deal more than one may dare to say ; and as she listened, again in her heart did Lady Wedderburn congratulate herself on the escape of her eldest son "from the snares of that designing girl."

Singularly enough, the next day was to behold somewhat of a change in her views regarding Mary Lennox.

Just as she and Gwenny were setting forth in the basket-phaeton which was drawn by a pretty pair of Orkney ponies, for a drive as far as the town of Greenlaw, a man whose face seemed not unfamiliar, approached, and respectfully lifting his bonnet, craved a few words "with her Ladyship."

"I think I know your face," said she, pausing, whip in hand, and bowing pleasantly to encourage him.

"I am Tony Heron, my lady, a gate-keeper at Chesterhaugh."

"Well, Tony, what can I do for you?"

"Much, madam, if you are but willing, and a' in the Merse ken how kind you are to the poor. I have a wife and five wee bairns that can neither work nor want. They are a' thrown on my hands, which are empty, for the Mansion House is you know shut up; Chesters has gone to the wars; the servants are all dismissed, and I have got notice to quit too, from Grub and Wylie, the writers."

"Poor man!" said Gwenny, beginning to open her purse; but Lady Wedderburn checked her, for the man, who saw she had mistaken his intended appeal, blushed scarlet and drew back.

"You want employment, I presume?"

"Just so, my lady; and if you or Sir John could find me something to do about Willowdean, to put a little bread into the bairns' mouths, I'd be beholden to you for life. I have been twenty years in service, and have a good character."

"But from a bad master."

"I was servant to the good laird his father, before him."

"I fear you may find it a poor recommendation to Sir John having been at Chesterhaugh."

"So I hear on all hands now," said the other, with a sigh of bitterness; "but no man can say a word derogatory to the character of Tony Heron."

"Well, I shall speak to Sir John and the

ground bailie, and do what I can for you, Tony, were it but for the children's sake."

The man's eyes kindled with gratitude; but he was not profuse in thanks; for Scotchmen, reserved at all times, seldom are so. Suddenly, checking her ponies again, Lady Wedderburn asked—

"Were you the gate-keeper who was cognisant of the visits Miss Lennox paid your bachelor master?"

"Miss Lennox never visited my master," replied the man with a glance of genuine surprise.

"But you must have heard it said that she did?" continued Lady Wedderburn, looking astonished in turn.

"I have heard, my lady, what a' the countryside has been ringing wi'; but Miss Lennox was never, to my knowledge, at Chesterhaugh save once, and then she came to visit *me*."

"You—about what—or for what reason?"

"She came in the evening, about the sunset time, to make some inquiry anent the terrible night when Mr. Cyril—that is, Captain Wedderburn—went amissing; to ask me the hour he left—if his horse was restive, and so forth?"

"What interest could *she* possibly have in the matter?" asked Lady Wedderburn, rather haughtily, and with a heightened colour.

"Interest, my lady! Through a' the Lammermuirs, secret as they thought it, it was well

kent that they loved each other well and truly, till some quarrel came between them. Just as she was asking me all about the captain, poor thing, her heart seeming to be in her mouth the while, the master lured her inside the gate, and then the storm of hail and snow came suddenly on. She wished to take shelter in my lodge; but the master would not hear of it, and half led, half pulled her into the house, where he kept her till midnight, as his hellicate groom, Billy Trayner, told us, by pretending that the springs of his waggonette were broken; and that is the whole story, my lady; and if I have told you a word that is untrue, may my puir bairns lack the bread I'm seeking to win them!"

"Why did you not state this before?" asked Lady Wedderburn, angrily.

"To whom, my lady? Besides, it was not my place or interest to speak against my master."

"True," she replied, and a keen emotion of remorse inspired her, as she now saw that the poor girl in her love for Cyril—artful though it might be—and her burning anxiety to learn tidings of him, after that terrible night and time of suspense and dread, had permitted herself to be lured into the false position we have so fully described elsewhere, and which was so destructive to her peace of mind and place in society.

"Call again to-morrow, Tony, and I shall see what can be done for you. Meanwhile," she

added, turning to Gwenny, "We must call openly on Miss Lennox, and see if we cannot in some measure repair the serious injury that has been done her."

"I don't think she will see you, my lady," said Tony Heron.

"Not see me—why?" she asked haughtily.

"Because as I passed the tower gate this morning, I heard the women lamenting, for the Laird of Lonewoodlee had died in the night; and he is the last of the auld Lennox line, my lady," added the man, with an emotion of respect.

Lady Wedderburn, to do her justice, was inexpressibly shocked and grieved when she heard of this, notwithstanding all the old quarrels and coolnesses in the past time. She relinquished her idea of driving, and sent Gervase Asloane with cards of condolence; and she even in the first emotion of generosity wrote to Cyril on the subject; but he never got her letter (as she was pleased to think, on after-thoughts), for the mail steamer by which it went was cast away in the Gulf of Salonica.

And, though she knew it not, times there were when Cyril's thoughts flashed home, quicker than the electric wire could have brought them: when he sat in his tent at Varna, gazing listlessly out upon the flat shore, the vast blue semicircular bay, and the hideous, gloomy, and

dilapidated Bulgarian town, while his heart grew filled with irritating doubts and vague regrets, and with the mournful image of his lost Mary. Was she indeed false, as had been represented, and with Rooke Chesters of all men? Had she forgotten him? Had separation and time effaced his memory from her heart? Was he now as one she had never known and never cared for?

"Well, well," he would think, "a few more weeks must see me at Eupatoria, and a Russian bullet may solve all my doubts and difficulties."

But we are somewhat anticipating the regular progress of our story.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SHADOWY HAND AT LONEWOODLEE.

DURING all this time that the summer had been verging towards autumn, and the corn yellowing on lea and upland, Mary Lennox had been unremitting as usual, in the lonely task of tending her father's sick-bed.

She had only heard incidentally of Cyril's departure for the seat of war—that he had gone without a word of kindness or farewell to her who loved him as her own soul and more ; and for a time, that soul had seemed to die within her.

Her betrothal ring was a fond link—a species of sentimental fetter—from which she had no wish to free herself, otherwise she might have drawn it from her finger and cast it in the fire !

The first time that Cyril had called her Mary—her Christian name—still dwelt in her memory with exquisite tenderness, from the very novelty of the circumstance. The *last* time he had called her Mary, dwelt in her memory too ; but

with anguish, for then it had been uttered in a tone of wrath, of sorrow and upbraiding.

Music was the great solace of old Oliver Lennox's lonely days. He loved to hear the rich and glorious voice of his daughter, and thus, for many an hour she played and sung to him, while her heart was full, nigh unto bursting, with thoughts that would not be repressed.

Like an angel of mercy had poor Mary hovered about that sick-bed, where her only tie to earth was about to be severed; for at last there came a day, she was never to forget, when the doctor assured her that all his skill could "protract life no longer, and that ere nightfall, too probably, all would be over;" and Mary heard him without tears, for now they would not flow; but the old anxious and clamorous sensation about her heart, became replaced by a gnawing concentrated agony too keen for description; and as she listened to the fatal words of Doctor Squills, felt the kind pressure of his hand and heard his steps die away as he left the house, she gazed in a kind of stupor across the landscape, where the setting sun shone so warmly, and, it seemed, so mockingly, in his summer splendour, on the green pasture lands, and on the trees where the birds were singing so merrily, while through the open windows the hum of the mountain bee, and sweet perfume of the honeysuckle came together,

"Must it be—must it be—at last—at *last*!" she murmured through her clenched teeth; and creeping once more to his side, she kissed her father's brow and caressed his silvery locks, that were now as thin and fine as floss silk; and as she did so, there flashed on her memory the old tradition that "a grey head was ne'er kamit" (*i.e.*, combed) by a Lennox of Lonewoodlee, for in domestic brawls or foreign wars, they all perished early; but the manners were changed for the better now.

For a time he seemed unconscious of her presence, and spoke only of her dead brother.

"Oh, my Harry," he murmured, "your mother was in her grave, and never knew how gallantly you led your squadron on that terrible day against the Sikhs."

"Mamma is in Heaven, and oh, papa, may know it all!" whispered Mary.

Then suddenly a light seemed to penetrate the darkness of his mind; he recognised her, and drew her close to his breast in a tremulous embrace.

"Mary, my own little Mary," said he in low and laboured accents, "the bitterness of death is not in dying, but in leaving you without a home—without a friend—for all passes away with me."

"God will guard and guide me, papa!"

"Our past, with all its traditions and history,

has been an honourable past ; yet we Lennoxes have been going down in the world—*down* so surely as I shall go to my grave—my poor child !”

After a long pause he spoke again ; but more feebly.

“ Play me something, Mary, while I can yet listen ; for the music soothes me into dreams and fills me with prayerful thoughts ; play to me once again, Mary,” he added with a smile that made her heart sicken, for it was the last flash up of the dying light, ere that light went out for ever !

Mary seated herself at the piano in the adjoining room, and while tears streamed over her face, and her tremulous hands could barely touch the keys in accompaniment, she slowly sung two verses of a hymn :

“ Gentle Jesus, look with pity
From Thy great white throne above ;
All the night my heart is wakeful
In Thy sacrament of love.
Shades of evening fast are falling,
Day is fading into gloom ;
So when shades of death fall round us,
Lead thine exiled children home.”

For a time the old man had beat feebly with his fingers on the coverlet ; then all motion ceased, and when Mary stole in, a cry escaped her, and she sank on her knees, burying her face in the bedclothes.

The day had indeed faded into gloom; the old man had passed away to the foot of the Great White Throne; and, a terrible reality, the unseen, yet shadowy hand was resting on Lonewoodlee.

* * * * *

There were now silence and utter desolation in that sequestered tower among the moorlands. The blinds were drawn down; old and dingy blinds they were, making the deeply set windows look more gloomy in the walls which were of such strength and thickness.

Alison Home, after the first noisy explosion of her grief, when she uttered spasmodic sobs and rocked herself to and fro before the kitchen fire, moved about stealthily and softly in list shoes, as if fearing still to disturb the old Laird, who died where so many of his forefathers had lain, and where many of their brides had slept.

The stillness, the solemn hush of death were over all, and nowhere more than in the desolate heart of Mary. Everything connected with such an event in Scotland is so grim, so stern, so funereal, and utterly without aught to alleviate the mind of the survivor, that it becomes harrowing in the extreme. There are no prayers for the dead; no pretty offices, such as the decoration of the body with flowers: no service of any kind is performed beside it, so that the living may linger near in a labour of love to the last. A

white sheet is simply spread over to hide *it*, and then the body is left to stiffen into ghastly rigidity of outline.

And this death had not come unaccompanied by omens; the watch-dog had moaned painfully all the preceding night; and Alison Home, and the other domestic, had of course heard the death-bells tinkling in their ears, according to the peasant superstition in the old ballad:

“Yestreen I heard the death-bell sound,
When a' were fast asleep;
And aye it rung, and aye it sung,
Till a' my flesh did creep.”

Though in days and months past, Mary had often, in anticipating the present terrible contingency, thought of her own future, she forgot all about it now. She had even ceased to think of Cyril Wedderburn till his mother's card came, and a bitter smile crossed the girl's pale face as she placed it on the table, where lay an open letter from Messrs. Grub and Wylie, the solicitors, “threatening legal proceedings anent the bill handed to us by our client Captain Chesters of Chesterhaugh.”

It might safely lie on the table unheeded *now!*

Mary Lennox was indeed alone! Sorrow-stricken as she was, there was not on all the earth a being who could share her terrible emotion of grief. She had no friend nigh to

soothe her awful loneliness by a single word that was not so conventional as to be repellant. She had no home, no house, no shelter now from the too probable want that must soon overtake her!

Dark and cheerless indeed was the prospect of the bereaved girl; there were affliction and agony for the present, with vague terror of the future. No hand was near to caress, and no voice to soothe her, as she lay weeping on her bed, sleepless and without rest, though prostrate from over-wrought emotion. There was something terrible in the desolation of that young heart, thrust back upon itself, even in its craving for sympathy. She had not even that relief afforded to sorrow by having around her friends to whom she might speak of the dead, and hear his real or imagined virtues extolled, remembered, and descanted on.

The two old female servants sat cowering by the kitchen fire, talking in low whispers of the Shadowy Hand on the wall, and wondering if it was visible now; but then there was no moon. According to an old custom, or superstition, they had covered up with white every piece of furniture the chamber of death contained, and then the door thereof was carefully closed, for in rural districts the people fear the dead may speak if it is left ajar, though the whistle of the locomotive is fast banishing all such foolish fancies.

The minister of Willowdean, a cold and somewhat pompous personage, came on the morrow, and his extempore prayer—one stereotyped in his mind, having been delivered on a thousand similar occasions—though hard and unsympathetic, and most jarringly intoned, soothed her a little, because his meaning was good, and he wished to be kind apparently.

The Reverend Gideon M'Guffog was a burly, hard-featured, and sandy-whiskered Galwegian, who seemed more like something between a bluff grazier and a sleek attorney, than a clergyman. At the close of his prayer, which he delivered with his eyes shut, he glanced with surprise at the open piano, on which the music Mary had last used was yet remaining neglected or forgotten.

"Music?" said he, in a tone of reprehensive inquiry, while glancing at Mary, under, over, and finally through his spectacles.

"It is the hymn I sang to my darling papa last night; he loved it so, next to *Adeste fideles*, indeed; and it was while I was singing it, he passed away from me," said Mary in a choking voice.

The measure of the Reverend Gideon's reprehension became full when he read over the hymn in question.

"It is ritualistic, even popish in spirit, Miss Lennox, and I deplore that the last sounds heard on earth by the ears of your esteemed father, were

such as these. But oh, let not me bruise the bruised! My poor young lady, this sort of thing comes of your being so sadly left to yourself."

He retired, promising to call again. But nothing that he could say had the effect of crushing Mary's spirit lower, though she felt that in life or in death she had nothing to reproach herself with as a daughter.

As he was in haste to address a meeting of the Sabbatarians and self-righteous folks of Willowdean, who were getting up a petition to the Home Office to prevent the working-men of Edinburgh from entering the Botanical Gardens of that city "on the Lord's Day," and indulging in the desecration of it by enjoying flowers and sunshine, he hurried away; but permitted his wife, who had latterly ignored Mary's existence (at least since the Chesterhaugh story), to remain with her, till the funeral matters were arranged. This was but an act of Christian charity; and when it became known in the neighbourhood, that the impoverished Laird of Lone-woodlee was dead, many shook their heads regretfully, when remembering, like honest Sir John Wedderburn, his stately manners, his steady seat in the hunting field, his convivial qualities, his dignified, old-fashioned courtesy, his queer feudal notions; and all agreed that a link with the past was broken.

A few others speculated on what would become of his beautiful orphan daughter.

The funeral day came at last, the great and final wrench to poor Mary, who was secluded in her own room, as men alone are present when "the Prayer" is given in Scotland; but she heard that Sir John Wedderburn and his youngest son were present in deep mourning, and she sobbed more heavily at the intelligence.

Cyril's father! Cyril's brother!

"Dead!—dead!" she would whisper in her heart. "How shall I struggle through the world alone? Who will love me now that my dearest papa is dead?"

So Oliver Lennox was buried in the Lennox aisle of Willowdean Kirk, where are lying the tombs of his race for three hundred years, back even to Oliver who built the Tower, as the legend above its door records. And with a face of due solemnity, specially got up for the occasion, his solicitor from Edinburgh acted as chief mourner; for neither kith nor kin had Oliver left to stand by his grave on that solemn day when the turf fell like a green curtain over the last scene of his history.

"Better in his narrow home than in the Tolbooth of Willowdean or Greenlaw; for it was coming to *that*, sir!" whispered his solicitor in the ear of Sir John Wedderburn, to whom, as a Baronet and man of property, he had stuck like a barnacle during the whole of the melancholy ceremony.

CHAPTER X.

A SURPRISE.

WHEN Oliver Lennox passed away, he left Mary little that she could call her own, save her paraphernalia and a few jewels that had been her mother's. Lonewoodlee had been sold piecemeal in times long past, and the little that remained was mortgaged to the turret-vanes. The spot of ground around it was mortgaged too, even to the last tree that grew thereon. There was the old furniture of the days of the Regency, now scarcely worth removal; there were some grim old portraits, by Ramsay and Aikman, and even two by Sir Peter Lely, which would sell readily to those who were "getting up" galleries of ancestors elsewhere. There were some old arms, even bits of armour that had seen service in the Border Wars; steel caps and jacks, and Jedwood axes; old cabinets, and eggshell china in the chintz-covered drawing-room; old books, old rods and guns, and whips; and many a household god, to which Mary's heart clung yearningly now that she knew

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she must leave them all behind her; for whichever way her eyes turned they fell on some object through which, by the mere association of ideas, she was tortured.

But she strove to cast such thoughts aside, as she reflected on the littleness of life and the worthlessness of it—a bitter conclusion when formed by the heart of one so young, and when that heart should feel all the best impulses of hope in a joyous future, and in a long life of lasting happiness.

Had her father been more provident in his hot fox-hunting youth; had her brother, the lancer, contracted fewer debts of honour, her fate might, she knew, have been different now. But her father was dead, and Harry was dead—buried in his Indian grave, far, far away; so she crushed the thoughts that would upbraid them. Yet when taken in conjunction with her broken engagement, and the whole details of her luckless love affair with Cyril Wedderburn, her heart

“Ached with thoughts of *all* that might have been,”

had her fortune and circumstances in life been more prosperous and suitable to her birth.

When the gloomy excitement of the funeral was past, and she came steadily to see the necessity for facing the future, she felt at times an irritation—an almost angry and defiant emotion at Destiny; while sharing with Alison Home the

hope that "when things are at the worst, they are sure to mend—at least they couldna' weel be waur." But she knew that with her they must mend elsewhere than in her old ancestral home. And knowing that the Chesters' story had caused her to be coldly and malevolently regarded in the neighbourhood, now she felt only the most intense longing to quit it, and for ever.

In the years of the future, if God spared her, when her name had been forgotten here, she might, if she chose, return again to see her father's grave, and perhaps to erect a little monument over it. And so, thinking over these possibilities, pondering alone—for the minister's wife had that day gone back to the Manse—Mary, seated in her modest black dress, gave herself up to thoughts that became most difficult to unravel.

She leaned her head upon her right hand, and sat in the deep recess of one of the dining-room windows. She heard only the beating of her heart, save when the intense solitude that reigned around the old house was broken by the cawing of the black rooks in the ancient thicket—the *lone wood*—from which the Tower took its name, or the bleating of a sheep on the hillside close by.

A day was coming, she knew, when her eyes must rest on other lands and prospects than the old familiar view she saw from her window now ;

and never did the fields, laden with golden grain, or the green pasture meadows and the purple heather of the hills now bathed in the amber hues of sunset, look more lovely than in this her time of sorrow.

With all her anxiety to begone now, she dreaded the change. She was so young, and so totally ignorant of the world and all its crooked ways; the uprootal from old associations amid which she had lived from infancy; the risk of venturing among the cold, hard, suspicious, and perhaps unpitying strangers—more than all, of precipitating herself into a human wilderness so vast, and to her unknown, as that of London, appalled her—for to London she was bent on going!

She felt herself little able to work, but alike ashamed and unable to beg! These, and such as these, were crushing thoughts to a tender girl in the sensitive time of youth, when all around her should be happiness and sunshine.

Her former friends and school companions now in London were, many of them, girls of good and high position. But in her change of circumstances she shrunk from intruding on any of them as a suppliant; and resolved that among strangers only should she look for work and bread.

So immersed was Mary in her own sad thoughts that she heard neither the sound of horses' hoofs,

the rolling of wheels, nor the barking of the Dalmatian dogs; nor was she roused from her reverie till the startled Alison Home placed before her an old and well-worn silver salver, whereon lay two black-edged cards. Almost immediately after there was a rustling of silk and crape, as Lady Wedderburn and Gwendöleyne entered; and, being both in deep mourning, their appearance was most consonant to the occasion. Lady Wedderburn at once introduced herself, adding,—

“Miss Lennox—my niece, Miss Wedderburn.”

A flush crossed Mary's pale face, and her quickened heart beat painfully as she rose to receive visitors who were entirely unexpected. But still, in the native pride of her heart, she strove to restrain her tears.

“Lady Wedderburn,” said she, “it is most—most kind of you to come to me——”

“Surely not at a time like this, my dear child,” replied Lady Wedderburn, seating herself on the deep old horse-hair sofa, and thinking how beautiful and how perfectly ladylike the pale girl looked in her black dress—an orphan in mourning for her father.

“Yes, at a time like this—the darkest of a blighted, a stricken life!” continued Mary, deeply moved by the soft and kind manner of her visitors.

"My son Cyril asked me to—to—;" poor Lady Wedderburn paused, conscious that she was beginning to blunder already.

"Cyril—Captain Wedderburn—did *he*——"

"Yes. He asked me to be kind to you if aught happened. You understand, Miss Lennox?"

Mary *did* understand, and she began to weep hysterically, while her visitors, unused to grief of this kind, glanced at each other uneasily.

The elder had ignored, slighted, even "cut" her. But could Mary forget that she was the mother of Cyril, who once loved her, and whose ring was yet on her engagement finger—Cyril, whom she still loved so well! Her heart was crushed by her own great grief: she felt weak and tender, and had the desperate longing in her utter and intense loneliness for some one to love her, for something to cling to. And she had now all the passionate desire to throw herself into the arms of Lady Wedderburn, as she might have done into those of a parent, and then weep freely and fully, pouring out her sorrow; but a remnant of family pride—the genuine old Scottish instinct, of not "letting oneself down," sustained Mary's spirit, and withheld the generous emotion which the other was too motherly and too kind-hearted to have misunderstood.

She had admitted Cyril's interest in Mary's welfare, and she resolved to ignore that she knew

or suspected more ; but somehow the conversation always turned to Cyril.

" I have now learned,—I think it right to tell you, my dear Miss Lennox—the true story of that visit you paid to the house—the gate, I mean—of Captain Chesters. I learned it quite incidentally," she added, perceiving that a momentary flash of anger lit up Mary's eyes ; " but I do think, as a friend, that it was most unfortunate for yourself that you concealed it so."

" I concealed it, knowing the character of Captain Chesters, and in dread of the very event that took place."

" And this event ?" asked the other, looking a little perplexed.

" Was your son's just indignation at that which I had no control over ; indeed I had not," replied Mary, referring thus to her engagement in the most straightforward manner, and not ill-pleased that the attractive eyes of the beautiful cousin were occupied by an album in the recess of a window.

" Control ?" stammered Lady Wedderburn, not knowing well what to say.

" Before that, he loved me very truly, madam."

" For long ?"

" Almost ever since he brought my dear papa my brother's sword and rings from India."

"And you loved him?"

"Yes," replied Mary, in a low voice like a sigh.

"It was great duplicity on Cyril's part, when he knew our families were on bad terms; and *latterly*," she added, with a glance at the unconscious Gwenny, "an unfortunate folly on yours, under all the circumstances."

"You refer, madam, I presume, to the engagement with his cousin of which Captain Chesters told me?"

Lady Wedderburn was silent; and thus, unwittingly, perhaps, permitted Mary to adopt a painful error.

"Well, well," she sighed, looking sadly down the while; "I can have no more bereavements now. My papa's death leaves me alone in the world."

"Alone?"

"Yes; God and myself only know how fearfully alone!"

"This is most sad," replied Lady Wedderburn, kindly, as she took Mary's hands in hers, and gazed tenderly into the sweet young face. "Can I not assist you, Miss Lennox? In anything you may command me," she added, for secretly her heart went forth to the girl who had loved her absent son, and had the courage to honestly avow that love; so with charming inconsistency, forgetting all about her past accusation of art,

of cunning, and decoying on Mary's part, with much of pity and sudden affection, she surveyed her; for Mary was so wasted and worn by past watching, nursing, and sorrow, that she was more like a spirit, having dark brown hair and large violet eyes, with bluish unhealthy circles under them, than a living being.

"You do not seem strong, Miss Lennox," said she.

"Nor am I; my health may never recover the shocks I have sustained of late, with dear papa's long illness, and the hard task—a labour of love—watching him by night and day; so Doctor Squills tells me, that unless I am very careful, my grave is not far distant, and at best, assuredly not far off."

"Poor child! And what do you mean to do? Pardon me, but you cannot live here alone."

"Here!" repeated Mary, and as she glanced at the old faded dining-hall, the bitter smile stole over her lip again; "no, not here—not here. I mean to get some teaching if I can."

"And if not?"

"Then I can but—die!"

"Do not speak thus, I implore you!"

"My voice is thought to be a good one, and has been well cultivated, for papa was vain of it; but I fear I have lost a note or two since—since——"

"Since when?"

"Last March."

("That was when Cyril left this," thought Lady Wedderburn.)

"And you mean to go London, I have heard; is that true?"

"Yes; in a few days."

"Have you friends there?"

"Not one."

"This is a terrible—a bleak prospect!"

"Bleak indeed; fatherless, motherless, and in time, it may be, penniless! But not hopeless, while God spares and helps me. Assuredly, Lady Wedderburn, this world is not the place where our fondest hopes are realized, or where our brightest dreams are always embodied. It is a place, rather, where we should bear and forbear one with another, striving to be happy if we can; and if we cannot be happy, to be at least resigned and content."

"My poor child, by living so much alone, you have learned to talk and think painfully beyond your years," replied the other, who could not help contrasting the probable fate, fortune, and future of Mary and Gwenny, both alike so young and beautiful.

Somehow her visit proved a very protracted one. She found the charms of Mary's mind and manner were such, that even her loveliness seemed to be but a secondary excellence. She

pressed her to visit Willowdean—to come away with her now in the carriage; to spend even a single day there; but Mary remembered her father's luckless and expensive quarrels and disputes with Sir John; she thought, too, of the bitter slights and mortifications that had been put upon herself; and now that all was over between her and Cyril, and that another possessed the love that had once been her own, she steadily declined, so her visitors ceased to press; and all this seemed very strange to the blushing and simpering Mrs. M'Guffog, who had just returned, happy that she was in time to have an opportunity of even shaking hands "wi' her leddyship."

She prevailed upon Mary, however, to accept of a letter of introduction to a lady friend in London, who had two little daughters, and who, she was assured, would befriend her; and for this, Mary felt herself compelled to express gratitude; and there the interview, which afforded sincere pleasure to Mary, ended, and the splendid carriage, with its liveried servants and brace of spotted dogs, rolled away from the door of the desolate and dilapidated house.

When Gwenny, after kissing Mary and weeping with her at parting, in the mode adopted by most young ladies, who so readily share each others' joys and griefs—expatiated on the romantic solitude of the old tower, and the quaintness

—so she was good-natured enough to term it— of its furniture and so forth, Lady Wedderburn reminded her that the Lennoxes were but as mushrooms when compared to the old Welsh line of Ap-Rhys of Llanchillwydd; but so she might, with a safer conscience, have added were the Wedderburns of Willowdean; for so, even in this advanced age of the world, will some people talk, and set a mighty store upon their real or fancied little bit of heraldry, as if there had been more Adams than one in Eden.

CHAPTER XI.

MARY BEGINS HER PILGRIMAGE.

WITH that promptitude which women can so often exert when in grief or adversity, Mary made all her preparations for leaving Lonewood-lee. It was already in the hands of creditors or their agents, and every day she remained she felt as if they were conferring an obligation upon her, and that idea was intolerable ! A few relics of her father she secured for herself. The embroidered slippers he had last worn—her own working ; his spectacles, an old riding-whip, and other mementos were put away as sacred treasures, over which she often wrung her poor little hands, and as the emotions of the child welled up in her heart, would weep—oh, so bitterly !

Mary had sometimes—especially latterly—re-pined at the dulness of her impoverished home ; but now, with an emotion of repentance, she shed salt and silent tears, at the misery of leaving its shelter for a future which she could

not foresee, and some dark forebodings of which had already begun to steal upon her.

The last day there was a dull and melancholy one indeed. A dense mist had set in from the German Sea, and was rolling in masses along all the glens and ravines of the Lammermuirs; the wind seemed to sigh with a deep "sough" in the old pine wood, and the old house-dog, as if sensible of some impending change or calamity, uttered ever and anon a low and dismal howl.

Mary was taking away with her only a trunk, for everything that had belonged to the family in past times, and all their most treasured household *lares*, were to be left behind for the hammer of the inexorable auctioneer.

Jealously tender of her dead father's honour, Mary had changed into money everything in the shape of jewellery that the solicitors would permit her so to turn (for even the stony hearts of Grub and Wykie were moved); she had thus paid to the last penny all he owed in the neighbourhood; and leaving herself but a very little stock in gold—enough, perhaps, to maintain her for a few weeks, till she discovered some one to appreciate her musical talents and those little domestic accomplishments by which she hoped to feed herself in the great metropolis of the world.

So the fatal or eventful evening came at last,

and Mary, with her little trunk, was driven over to the Railway station by Doctor Squills, who, as he had always admired her greatly in secret, was somewhat moved on this occasion. As he turned the gig down the roadway from the hills, Mary begged of him to pause for a moment, while she gave a last long, wistful glance at Lonewoodlee, which—save that no smoke ascended from its chimneys now, and that all the windows were closed—looked just as it must have done for three centuries, a grey and stony mass, with its four turrets standing sharply up against the evening sky.

The little garden, once so trim and neat, was a mere wilderness now, where the jasmine grew in wild masses round the old lichen-spotted dial-stone; and the ancient pines of the thicket which her usually improvident father had spared for beauty's sake, and where she had been wont to meet Cyril, were marked by the axe for cutting down and "sale by public roup at the Market Cross of Willowdean," as a large placard informed the passer.

There had been a time when she had pictured herself leaving Lonewoodlee—if she ever left it—as the bride of Cyril Wedderburn, happy, joyous, and filled with the natural anticipations of a long and brilliant future.—Now! tears choked her under her veil, as she felt keenly all the bitterness of the present, when con-

trasted with the vanished hopes of the past. It was all over—all—all; and certainly on this side of the grave they would never meet again.

“Drive on, Doctor, please; I fear we shall be late for the train—I am sure I hear the whistle already!” said she, making a prodigious effort to be calm.

In her motherly heart, Lady Wedderburn viewed with much of pity and more of terror, the fact of a solitary and beautiful girl, one so gently bred and nurtured and so totally ignorant of the world, setting forth on a pilgrimage so hazardous; while Sir John, with his usual open-handed liberality, thought of enclosing a cheque to her for a handsome sum, pretending it was some debt he owed her father; but his wife assured him that the spirit of Mary Lennox was such, that she would too probably return it as an insult; so the good man sighed as he relinquished the idea, adding—

“Ah, poor thing—she was so fond of our Cyril, you say;” and he sighed again over his wine that evening, and said, “Kate, Kate, I cannot now, without regret and emotion, regard this utter destruction of an old Border family, with all its local and historical associations. Poor obstinate, passionate Oliver Lennox! I would, for the girl’s sake, he had guided his patrimony as he might have done.”

Lady Wedderburn agreed with him ; but Robert thought " the sooner such geese as old Lennox were plucked and in the market, the better."

"There speaks the lawyer," retorted his father ; " but poor Lennox knew one art only—that of squandering."

Meanwhile, Mary was standing as one in a dream on the platform of the little station at Willowdean, where the Reverend Gideon M'Guffog and a few others waited, either to see her off, or more likely to see the train come in, that event being then somewhat of a novelty in the secluded locality. He omitted to warn her, an inexperienced girl, of the perils that might so easily beset her path in a city so vast as London ; but he did not fail to warn her to " beware of prelacy, popery, ritualism, and other errors and snares of the Evil One, abounding in the land to which she was going."

Sobbing bitterly as she bade her adieu, old Alison Home, forced upon her acceptance a pair of worsted boots of her own knitting, " to keep her feetie warm in the train," as she said, though the season was the end of summer ; and a tall footman in plush brought her from Willowdean a beautiful bouquet and a pretty basket of fruit, with " the compliments and best wishes of Miss Wedderburn."

Her rival—her supplanter ! yet she received

the graceful gifts quietly, and returned a polite message of thanks.

To keep up appearances, she had taken a first-class ticket to Berwick, resolving to exchange there where she was unknown to a third-class for London, consoling herself by the reflection, that as an unprotected girl, she should doubtless be safer among the many, though more humble, who might be in the latter, than with one or two in the former class of carriage.

And as the train glided away, Mary gave a last and piercing glance at the familiar scenery around her, at the village spire, whose shadow at sunset fell upon the grave of her parents, and then she sank back into a recess of the carriage, to weep and commune alone, with all her thoughts turned inwards.

Every tie between her and her home was broken now ; and she had but one all-pervading idea, that on the day of her visit, Cyril's mother, by her *silence*, had tacitly admitted the fact of his engagement to his cousin Gwendoleyne.

"How soon, oh, how readily he forgot me!" she exclaimed, for she was alone.

Mary felt truly grateful to Lady Wedderburn for her letter of introduction, which was addressed to a Lady Wetherall in Piccadilly, and on the latter all her hopes were based. She wondered whether Piccadilly was a street or square—a park or suburb, and what

manner of person Lady Wetherall might be—whether old or young, grave or gay. Would she be kind to her? oh, if so, how very soon she should learn to love her and her two little daughters. If the girls were her daughters, then *she* could not be very old—middle-aged, pleasant and motherly, perhaps; for now when alone, and entirely among strangers, Mary began to feel a little timid; she had heard and read so much of the unmerited humiliations of governess life.

She had changed carriages at Berwick; the waters of the bordering Tweed had vanished, and she strove, but in vain, to court sleep in the comfortless third-class vehicle, while the swift night train sped on in darkness along the bleak Northumbrian coast line, by Morpeth, and by Newcastle, the lights of which she saw with astonishment from the famous High-level Bridge; and as the train “slowed,” then with growing fear and wonder did she look down on the quaint old bridge of the Tyne, on the pigmy figures in the gas-lit streets, and on the masts and yards of the shipping, more than one hundred and twenty feet below her!

So the monotonous night wore away, and weary, pale and nervous, with her black mourning dress powdered white with dust, she saw the train enter London, and run on for miles upon miles between dense streets, which being all

of brick, seemed strange and even foreign to her eyes, till she began to imagine it would never stop at all,—till about ten in the forenoon, when she found herself standing lost, bewildered, and literally stunned, amid the bustle and roar of the Great Northern Railway!

But last night—only last night, she had been amid the sequestered solitude of the heathy Lammermuirs, where, save the bleating of a sheep or the whistle of a curlew, no sound broke the oppressive silence!

CHAPTER XII.

IN LONDON.

THE space, the crowd and the bustle in and around the terminus of the Great Northern Railway, scared poor Mary, and literally took her breath away. Wearily, and with a haggard and almost despairing eye, the girl threw up her black veil and looked about her. The train had disgorged its hundreds on the spacious platform ; all seemed to have some decided object or path to pursue—some home or hotel to go to ; nearly all seemed to have friends to greet them, were able to select their own luggage, and depart on their way in confidence and security.

“Now then, young lady—move on, please,” said a policeman, and she moved on accordingly, but mechanically and forgetting all about the little trunk which contained all her worldly goods, till she suddenly saw it on a barrow, with many others, when she claimed it, and was instantly surrounded by clamorous porters, and even cabmen seeking her as a fare, and using

strange slang terms of which she was totally ignorant.

"Where was she to be driven to?" some one asked her.

She could not say, but stood helpless and burst into tears. At that moment the guard of the train by which she had travelled—a ruddy complexioned, brown-whiskered, and jolly looking man—remembered that she was the young lady to whom the showily-liveried footman had brought the bouquet and fruit at Willowdean. He came forward and, touching his cap, politely said—

"Can I do anything for you, ma'am—'seem a stranger in London—'been here before?"

"Never."

"Where do your friends live?"

"I have none in London."

"Then where would you like a cab to take you?" he continued.

"That I cannot tell you—I am so utterly a stranger."

The guard began to look puzzled, and a policeman who was standing by, and had hitherto been gazing stolidly over his glazed leather stock, now seemed to take an interest in the conversation and to look suspicious, while one or two men of shabby appearance whispered together and drew near, till his eye fell on them, and then they slunk away.

"Do you know Lady Wetherall's house in Piccadilly?" asked Mary, timidly.

"I knows Piccadilly pretty well, ma'am—but can't say as I knows Lady Wetherall. Are you going there?"

"To-morrow—meantime I must rest for to-day and to-night; I am quite exhausted."

After a pause, the guard said,

"I daresay my missus wouldn't object to taking you in for a night till you could look about you, and do it cheap too. She prefers Scotch folks—queer, but every one to their taste. If you choose to cab it, I'll go along with you myself."

"Is she your wife of whom you talk, my good man?" asked Mary, feeling the necessity of rousing herself to action, for the eyes of many loiterers were now upon her.

"Wife—no, my landlady—poor woman she has seen better days, has Mrs. Long Primer."

"Of course—who ever knowed a landlady that hadn't?" said the policeman, laughing.

"She's a respectable woman—a printer's widow, ma'am; and though her name be Long, she's little enough."

"Well, Tom," resumed the policeman, "I think you'd better take the young woman away with you; she may get into trouble else, being, I see, quite a stranger—a jolly green one too, sure as my name is Finnis."

This style of dialogue was Mary's first taste of a new kind of humiliation. The distribution of two or three three-penny pieces procured the cab, on the box of which her trunk was hoisted; she stepped in, and the guard, Tom Gubbs, in his railway livery, followed her. As they drove through the streets the double lines of vehicles of all kinds, laden carts, drays and waggons, the multitude of sounds that mingled and united into a species of dull roar; the vast and ceaseless human tide that surged along the pavements, at first appalled Mary, and then seemed to lull her senses into a kind of stupor, from which the voice of her new companion roused her at times, as he kindly named the thoroughfares through which they were passing, or drew her attention to some great church or other public edifice.

At last, after traversing what seemed to be an enormous wilderness of streets, the cab turned to the left from the crowded Strand, down a quiet and narrow alley, where all was still and nearly noiseless, and at the foot of which a glimpse could be had of the Thames, with its shipping, and the crowded steamers gliding past. And now the vehicle stopped at the green-painted door of a large house, where people were lodged on the various floors, according to what they could afford to pay. Then the guard, Mr. Tom Gubbs, after a chaffing wrangle with the cabby, who insisted that his fare should be five, instead of

two shillings, informed her that this was "Norfolk Street, Strand."

To Mary's ear this conveyed no particular idea, but to her eye the houses looked gloomy, dingy, and strange, and she could not determine whether they had been built yesterday, or two hundred years ago; though with their quaintly corniced doors, old fashioned brass knockers, and general aspect, they looked like mansions at which Johnson and Garrick might have visited, near which Savage might have wandered in his hunger and misery, and where crown bowls of punch had been drunk over the defeat of "The Rebels" at Culloden, and the fall of Quebec,—for the quarter seemed decidedly London of the Hanoverian times.

Mary's *introduceur*, whose apartment was at the top of the house, vouched to the landlady for the respectability of her "new visitor," whom he said "had come from Scotland by the night-train, and was going to Lady Wetherall's in Piccadilly—to service of some kind, as he thought—to-morrow; but that she wished a few hours' rest, being well nigh wore out."

Indeed Mary looked as if about to sink, and when Mrs. Long Primer, a plump and motherly looking little woman in a huge white cap, asked her "on which floor she wished an apartment," she replied that it was a matter of total indifference to her; so the landlady solved

the difficulty by conducting her at once to a little room, one window of which faced the gloomy street; but the other afforded a narrow glimpse of the shining river with all its bustle.

A little breakfast was prepared for her, and now Mary with a swelling and thankful heart, shook hands with Gubbs the guard (who, on the morrow, she knew, would be speeding past the Lammermuirs, with the down train), and the worthy fellow blushed scarlet, for it had not been often his lot to have in his hand so white and beautiful as that of Mary Lennox.

A reference to the London Directory assured Mrs. Primer that there was a Lady Wetherall in Piccadilly. The weight and appearance of Mary's trunk, as it stood in the passage, suggested respectability, and it was filled with genuine wearing apparel. Her courier bag too, with all its little appurtenances, seemed faultless. Mrs. Long Primer studied all these things acutely, for she had been deluded, "taken in," more than once during her career as a landlady; but in the course of conversation with Mary, she soon learned her circumstances, her object in coming to London, and all her wishes; and the good woman felt her mother's heart stirred within her, as she surveyed the sad, weary eyes, the pale little face and the black dress of a creature so young and attractive cast on the world alone; and more sadly perhaps would she

have surveyed her, had she known how very few pounds the poor girl had in her pocket.

Unslept though she had been all the previous night, Mary felt unnaturally wakeful all day. The street was still and quiet, though close to the roar of the mighty Strand. No sound came to her ears there, save an occasional street cry, the paddling of a steamer shooting past with its human freight, or the bell of St. Clement's church, as the clock struck the slowly passing hours. She prayed in her heart and felt hopeful, for she had made her first essay in life and met with kindness.

She studied the advertisements in the *Times*, and the number of situations vacant filled her with wonder. Could people ever be found to supply them all ! On the other hand, the number of applicants, their talents, qualifications, and recommendations rather scared her, and made her happy to rest all her hopes upon Lady Wetherall. Yet she could not resist turning again and again, nervously, to the monstrous lists in the *Times*.

There were, "Wanted, a young lady for a millinery department—salary for the first year 50l." "Wanted, a young *person* of strictly Christian principles, as governess to five little girls ; solid English education, French, Italian, music, drawing, and the use of the globes necessary, salary 10l. per annum ; and the share of a

comfortable home." "Widow, wanted as house-keeper to a single gentleman, not over forty" (which was to be "not over forty," the advertisement did not say). "Wanted, a cook"—the cooks seemed decidedly to have the best of it, so far as salaries went; but Mary's heart sank as she read on, and then she cast the paper aside.

Quitting the rickety little calico-covered sofa, she frequently rose to look from the window into the street without. The architecture, material, and construction of the houses seemed novel to her eye, while the window panes being almost flush with the external walls, suggested alarming ideas of insecurity. The voices of the passers, and the names on the signboards, like the sound of the church bells, all spoke to her of being in a strange place, and of being utterly among strangers.

Slowly passed the day, and after she had been some hours alone, she began to feel forlorn and nervous.

Oh, the gloom of that London lodging-house—she should never, never forget it! Her liberty, her being so unheeded and uncared for, almost terrified her. There were none to greet her, and none whom she could greet. She felt as if her existence was already being ignored. To add to the gloom of her thoughts, she had read in that day's *Times* of two cases of death from starvation—death amid the wealth and luxury of

London. And in one instance the victim had been a governess, a lady of many accomplishments, but out of employment. Starvation! the idea filled her with horror; but, with God's help, such could never be her fate, for was there not Lady Wetherall, whom Lady Wedderburn felt assured would refuse *her* nothing?

The very opening and shutting of the house door, and the rat-tat of its knocker, suggested the idea of temporary lodgings, and not of home. *Home!* alas, she had none now, though even the dog's kennel or the half-ruined stable at Loneywoodlee, would have seemed as such to her then. Never more—never more, should she feel the sublime sense of security afforded by home and a father's roof!

She felt somewhat relieved, however, when gossip little Mrs. Primer came to ask her to "join her at tea, with a chop, quite cheery in her own back parlour." The kind woman had hot muffins, shrimps and watercresses—even a little flask of Old Tom—provided as a relish; and she was very anxious to hear all about Scotland (the late Mr. Long Primer's mother having been a native of that country), her ideas of which were decidedly cloudy, and somewhat pre-railway, being chiefly deduced from a cheap edition of Miss Porter's "Scottish Chiefs," and "Rob Roy," as she had seen it performed at the Lyceum or Surrey Theatre.

"And if Miss Lennox would like to go to the

play to-night, or any night," she added, "they could get a pit order from the first floor front, Miss Madalena de Montmorencie, who was leading lady at one establishment, or her third floor back, Mr. Algernon Sidney Spangles, who was the light comedy gent at another; or to see funny little Mr. Robson in 'Jones the Awenger,' when one didn't know whether to laugh or cry, and so did both at once; or to see Mr. Harley, as—begging your pardon, Miss—was Bottom at the Princess's." But Mary nervously declined all these kind offers of patronage, urging that she was in deep mourning, and had been face to face with sorrow too recently.

Even amid her intended civility and benevolence, Mrs. Primer came out at times with little remarks that jarred on Mary's, perhaps, overwrought sensibility.

"I think, my dear," said she, as she slowly stirred her tea and balanced the spoon from time to time on the edge of her cup, "you said it was a situation as governess you were a-looking after?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I quite forgot to ask—have you got a character?"

"A what—Mrs. Primer?" asked Mary, with genuine surprise, while the other began to fidget and cool her tea in the saucer.

"Testimonial of any kind from your last place?"

"No, I have never been in a situation, and consequently never thought such things were necessary."

"No character—no testimonials—not even a line from the rector or parish clergyman?"

"I have nothing of the kind."

"Oh lor, oh lor, you are simple as a new-born babby! Why, child, you'll not get a place even as a lady's maid, without some such papers."

"I have a letter of introduction, such as one lady may give to another," replied Mary, coldly and proudly, yet feeling crushed in heart and broken in spirit, for that such things should be said to her, plainly showed already how poor and dependent her position in life was becoming.

And Mary—she who, in her pride of heart, had shrunk from kissing Lady Wedderburn, while under the roof of her dead father's house—now in the utter loneliness of that heart, kissed with real affection the cheek of the plain little Englishwoman, as she left her for the night; for she felt gratefully conscious that Mrs. Long Primer had been kind and good to her.

But the word "character" continued to rankle in her memory; and at times, especially in the darkness and silence of her bedroom that night, ere she slept, there crept into her soul an intense longing to be laid at rest by her father's side, where she might never—too probably should never—lie, in the Lennox aisle at Willowdean.

CHAPTER XIII.

LOST.

REFRESHED by a deep and dreamless sleep, after her hands had been folded in prayer for assistance and guidance, Mary rose, inspired by a hope that ere the new day was past, she should have come to the end of her chief doubt and difficulty; but she had to count several weary hours until the time would be suitable for her to call on a person of Lady Wetherall's position.

The smart and bustling little Mrs. Long Primer suggested that Mary should take an omnibus so far as this or that point, changing here and changing there, as a matter of economy. However, Mary became so bewildered by the strange names and the infinite number of changes to be made, that she preferred going by cab; but before setting out she met with a terrible shock.

Mrs. Primer suggested some little change in her travelling costume, which Mary had for-

gotten all about; but she had the required alteration in her trunk.

"And that, I forgot to say, has gone before you to Lady Wetherall's, my dear," said Mrs. Primer, rubbing her hands over each other and smiling with pleasure.

"Before me—how?"

"Her ladyship's own man came for it this morning early, and left her compliments, with the message that you were to follow as soon as you chose."

"It is impossible—it is incredible!"

"Lor, Miss. How?"

"Lady Wetherall knows nothing about me, and nothing of my being in London. She never even heard a word of me!" said Mary, becoming very excited as she hurried to the passage and saw that her property was indeed gone.

"What can it mean?" asked Mrs. Primer, growing pale.

"The man must have been a robber."

"A robbery in my 'ouse, Miss Lennox—take care what you say, ma'am!" exclaimed Mrs. Primer, growing red, while all the quilling of her cap quivered with her anger.

"By Jingo, it looks very like it, missus," said Tom Gubbs, the guard, who had overheard these remarks, as he was about to depart for the mid-day train; "it's a regular do, Mrs. Primer, and has been done by one of the fellows as was a

loafing and listening about the platform at the Terminus yesterday—perhaps it's the cabby himself, for all we know or may ever know, that's away with the young lady's box, and she'll never see it again on this side o' time."

Mary was dreadfully harassed by this loss. The trunk—apart from a few little family relics—contained all she possessed in the world, and what she was totally without the means of replacing. She seemed so crushed that Mrs. Primer, in pity, felt the necessity of saying something.

"Her ladyship *may* have sent for it, after all. Might not your friend in Scotland have written to say that you were about to visit her?"

"Yes. But how were either of them to know that I was here?"

"It is impossible to say. The telegraph tells things wonderful now-a-days."

"And then she would have sent her carriage for me," said Mary, wearily and dreamily.

"If she has one."

"She must; for I have heard that she is very wealthy."

Tom Gubbs was off by this time to give information to the police, while Mary, unable longer to delay, procured a cab and set out for Piccadilly; but not before her kind landlady—whose prevailing idea was that people should eat under all circumstances, whether of joy or grief—

had forced her to partake of a little luncheon, and followed her to the door with the warmest wishes for her success.

Mrs. Primer's little ones were all dead, and the good-hearted woman having known much of sorrow in her time, felt a genuine interest in Mary and sympathy for her. She seemed so gentle, so thankful for any kindness, so unsuspecting and truthful; and yet withal, as a stranger utterly ignorant of London and its ways, most helpless.

She awaited her return with considerable impatience, and calculating that she might be away at the furthest about three hours, put off the usual time of tea (her most important meal, if it could be called such), that they might have it cosily together, with a pleasant chat about Lady Wetherall's house and establishment; what manner of woman her ladyship was; how she dressed; what her two little girls were like, and so forth.

She wondered if Mary would ever come to see her after she was fairly established in one of those great mansions in Piccadilly. Mrs. Primer hoped she might, for the young lady didn't look in the least proud; but the idea of herself returning the visit, and being admitted by a huge footman, all calves and whiskers, never entered the timid little woman's head.

The summer afternoon wore drowsily on, and

the shadows began to deepen and then to darken in the gloomy brick streets and alleys off the Strand. The clock of St. Clement's struck six, and Mary had now been absent four hours. Mrs. Primer could wait no longer. She took her tea alone, but left the pot to simmer on the hob, beside some hot muffins, for she was certain the poor young lady would return harassed and weary.

Another hour passed without her appearing. Still Mrs. Primer did not feel alarmed ; she knew that great folks dined very late, almost in the middle of the night, she had even heard ; and what could be more likely than Lady Wetherall keeping her visitor to dinner. So she looked forward with real pleasure to a description of the marvels thereof.

Eight, and then nine, were duly chimed in succession from the church tower, and still Mary was absent ; and when ten o'clock and darkness came together, Mrs. Long Primer began to feel a real anxiety mingled with alarm. She knew the snares and pitfalls that beset the steps of the unwary in London, and more particularly would one so beautiful as Mary Lennox be subjected to peril ; for she was an orphan, and utterly friendless and unknown. Mrs. Primer knew from an article she had lately read in the *Times*, that many more than a thousand beings disappeared in the streets yearly, being literally lost beyond all human

ken ; and dreadful stories of abductions and robberies, of concealed traps that opened over the river in the floors of nefarious dens and mysterious houses, recurred to her memory, for the slow rolling current of the mighty Thames hides many a terrible crime.

A sudden terror seized her : that the man who had stolen the trunk that morning might have got some deeper plot in hand ; that Mary might not have been taken to Piccadilly at all ; that some wicked woman might personate Lady Wetherall, and lure her away to where she might never be heard of again.

Midnight came, and still the girl was absent ; and then the good woman's anxiety of heart amounted almost to an agony, but she knew not what to do, or where, or to whom to go. Despite her fears of rheumatism and toothache, with a shawl over her head, she remained long at an open window, watching and listening. Twice or thrice a cab dashed along Howard Street, and then her heart leaped with hope ; but, as it turned into the Strand, the hope, like the sound of its wheels, died away.

The noises without became less and less. The gaslights in the adjacent houses had all been turned off ; silence and deeper darkness seemed to be settling all around her. Miss de Montmorencie and the light comedy man, who were always late, had both returned long ago, and it became evident

that the lost lady would not return until the morrow—if she ever returned at all!

Then another vague terror, that she might be held somehow responsible, personally, for this disappearance, occurred to Mrs. Long Primer, and added greatly to her perturbation of spirit.

At last she closed the window with a sigh, and was about to retire to bed, when suddenly, about two in the morning, a hansom cab dashed up to the door, and there was such a vehement use made of the brass knocker that the whole house resounded like a drum.

Mrs. Primer sprang again to the window, and a cry of alarm escaped her on beholding a night-policeman, flashing his bull's-eye on her brass plate, while alighting from the vehicle. And then the conviction came over her that some terrible catastrophe must have occurred to Mary Lennox!

She must have been robbed, maltreated, or ridden over at least!

CHAPTER XIV.

PICCADILLY.

WITH her heart full of sore anxiety concerning her loss, out of the quietude of gloomy and shabby Norfolk Street, Mary had been rapidly taken by the cab into the roar, the rush, the racket, and the breathless heat of London, in one of its hottest months, when every breath of air seems to have passed away, and the sunshades of the shop windows cast strong dark shadows on the heated pavement. Guiding his lean horse with marvellous skill, the cabman tore along between the endless tides of busses, crowded inside and out; drays and hansoms, splendid equipages, and costermongers' carts, and Mary felt again as if in a dream; for ages instead of hours seemed to have elapsed since she had left her sequestered home—the gloomy tower, the solemn thicket, the pastoral hills, and the months of close attendance on a sick bed, in a half-darkened and silent room. All, all seemed to have happened long, long ago; and all to be far, far away. So far that it seemed

incredible to realize the fact, that little more than ten hours by rail, would set her among the lonely Lammermuir hills again.

Along all the line that Mary was driven, none of the sordid squalor peculiar to some of the humbler parts of London was visible. All savoured of wealth, to be won or wasted, of splendour, and of luxury. There were stately buildings of vast magnitude; beautiful equipages, with shining liveries bearing past beauty and fashion: there were enormous plate-glass windows, glittering with jewellery and gold and silver vessels; rich dresses and fabrics, and good things of all kinds, from every portion of the habitable globe, and from the very waters that wash its furthest shores; everything that fancy can create or appetite suggest was there, for London is the true metropolis of the world.

As Mary looked on all this, hope began to spring up in her heart. Once established as an inmate of Lady Wetherall's house, she would earnestly and honestly do her duty to her pupils there; and perhaps elsewhere, in time to come, might, as a teacher, make her voice, so vaunted at home, the means of further acquisition. She would toil for money—not that she cared for lucre in itself—but as a means to an end. That she might relieve the wants of the indigent, and do good unto others, to people who might be as poor and forlorn, as she herself was then forlorn and

poor. She would seek the abodes of poverty and affliction, and God would reward her for all this by the blessings that would be poured upon her by grateful hearts. Among other fond projects for the future, was the erection of a monument to her parents at home ; and as she thought of it, there stole over the soft face of the pretty day-dreamer, weaving her plans even as Alnaschar wove his of fancied greatness, over the basket of crystal—a divine smile as she sketched the design in her mind’s eye, and traced the inscription to their beloved memory.

The girl was young, yet it was strange that no thought of a lover or of marriage ever entered her scheme of the days to come, till the appearance of a splendid battalion of the Foot Guards marching past the National Gallery with all their bayonets glittering in the evening sun, and the crash of their brass band waking the echoes of peristyle and dome, recalled Cyril to her memory with a keen pang ; and she reflected that it was better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all, for their passion had been a sweet one while it lasted.

“ God pity the desolate loving heart, the only star of whose hope is gone out in utter darkness ;” and so thought Mary, as she clasped her hands in bitterness.

From the Strand, where she had close glimpses of the mighty river, with its dark forests of masts

and rigging, past the great façade of Somerset House, up the Haymarket, and across Great Jermyn Street, she had been driven into Piccadilly and along that splendid thoroughfare, to Mary it seemed that they must have proceeded many miles, when the cabman suddenly drew up at the number she had given him, and, having successfully extracted from her double his legal fare, he whipped up his horse the moment she alighted, and disappeared, leaving her on the pavement, looking wistfully at the house; for among all the stately, gay, and brilliantly decorated mansions in Piccadilly, Lady Wetherall's alone seemed gloomy and deserted, and Mary's heart now began to palpitate, for it was the first time she had ever found herself about to face a total stranger in the attitude of a dependant or a suppliant.

The blinds were all down; the steps and entrance, which stood between four white pillars, seemed dusty, unswept, and neglected, and hence a foreboding chill, with a hope that Lady Wedderburn had mistaken the number, came over Mary's mind. She rang the bell, and had to do so thrice ere the door was opened by a sharp-featured little woman, who was dressed in rusty black with a widow's cap of portentous size, and who eyed Mary somewhat suspiciously and superciliously,

"Is this Lady Wetherall's—or have I made a mistake?" asked the visitor, timidly.

"Yes ; it is Lady Wetherall's 'ouse ; but what do *you* want, Miss ?"

"I have a letter for her——"

"Then you must post it, for her ladyship ain't at 'ome," replied the little woman, in a sharp falsetto voice.

"Not at home ?"

"No ; nor in England either."

"Where is she ?"

"With the family in Paris."

"But when does she return ?" asked Mary, clinging still to chances.

"Can't say, Miss ; but when the London season will be over, she will be sure to go down to the country. Can I do anything for you, Miss ?" asked the housekeeper, civilly enough, but gradually closing the door nevertheless.

"Nothing, thanks," said Mary, in a gasping voice as she turned away, and the woman watched her with some interest, for her steps seemed to totter when she reached the pavement. She felt the absolute necessity of getting out of the stunning and breathless bustle then, to consider the future. Immediately opposite Lady Wetherall's house a gate of the Park stood invitingly open, and the shadow of its trees looked tempting. She soon found a seat, and there, for more than an hour, Mary sat lost in thought and bewilderment—in fear and dejection,—totally oblivious of the number of men who passed and repassed ; of one or two who seated themselves near and

sought to attract her attention ; of the equipages and equestrians pouring past, and more than all of the policeman, who, perhaps luckily for herself, "had his eye on her," for to him there seemed something mysterious about her, and she evidently "didn't seem an every-day young woman ;" for it is one of the peculiarities of London that no person can be too respectable in aspect, too attractive in face or manner, too richly or plainly dressed, to be above suspicion ; and she frequently clasped her hands as she said in her heart—

"God help me ! What *am* I to do now ; in London, unknown, without employment, and robbed of all but a few pounds ?"

Lady Ernescleugh was in town ; she knew that her address was at a place called—she thought—Cavendish Square ; but Mary Lennox felt that she would rather die by the curbstone than appeal for aid or patronage to her, at whose table the odious story of Chesterhaugh had first been mentioned, to render her the victim of local impertinence, malevolence, and envy.

The sun had set ; the shadows in the Park were deepening, and the appearance of a few lamps twinkling at intervals, brought to Mary's mind the necessity for seeking the only roof of which she had any knowledge, kind Mrs. Primer's in Norfolk Street, from whence she resolved to write without delay to Lady Wedderburn for

advice, and to obtain, perhaps, a letter to some other wealthy friend in London. Already humbled and crushed by loneliness, by grief and misfortune, all foolish pride on the score of the Willowdean family had completely left her heart.

Her cab fare had been so excessive or extortionate that she resolved to make her way back on foot, trusting to the directions of strangers. Giving a small coin to a little fellow who had been going round and round her in wheel-fashion on his hands and feet with wonderful rapidity, she inquired of him "the way to Norfolk Street in the Strand."

Whether inspired by mischief, or in mere ignorance, Mary could never afterwards determine, but this imp of the pavement—one of those intensely sharp and funny little vagabonds who are so peculiarly of London growth, a denizen of the streets and gutters, where like wandering curs they hunt for chance morsels—sent her in exactly the opposite direction by pointing towards Hyde Park Corner, and telling her that when there she was to turn to the right and go straight on; the consequence was, that when darkness set in, and in her serious alarm she inquired of some one to "direct her to Mrs. Long Primer's, Norfolk Street, Strand," she was greeted with a rough laugh, and the inquiry if "she thought the Strand was to be found about Paddington," for near that quarter

of London she found herself, or supposed she found herself, misled, weary, and sinking with fatigue.

Never before had she been in the streets of a vast city by night, and the new scenes and sounds, the brilliant gin palaces, the music from occasional casinos and dancing-rooms, the strange words that were said to her, the vivid light at times, the strong dark shadows at others, all conduced to confuse and terrify her. Once or twice she received proper directions and wandered on in the desperate hope of recognising some landmark of her morning drive, such as St. Paul's dome, the Nelson pillar, or the National Gallery, but sought in vain.

The loss of her handkerchief, which had been filched from her—deliberately twitched out of her hand, indeed—suggested that she should take care of her little purse, which she secured in her bosom. She feared to offer money for a guide lest she should fall into some perilous snare; more than one man had already addressed her in bantering terms of endearment, which only terrified, but failed to excite anger in her heart; and, to avoid one of these who had begun persistently to follow her, in a pitiable state of irresolution she unfortunately turned down a quiet street, where she suddenly became involved in a miserable catastrophe.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LONELY STREET.

AFRAID lest this strange follower should accost her rudely or even molest her, Mary took advantage of the shadow in a portion of the street, to spring into the recess of a doorway, where with palpitating heart she laid a hand upon the bell, determined to seek succour at all hazards if he came near. The man evidently missed her, and while he was gazing about him irresolutely, three fellows of suspicious aspect, who appeared as suddenly as if they had been shot up through the pavement, flung themselves simultaneously upon him!

There was a brief—very brief—struggle; a choking sound as of strangulation, a half-stifled cry in which a shriek from Mary mingled, and then the ruffians, one of whom she perceived to be tall and thin, sallow-visaged, with a hooked nose and long moustache, vanished, leaving their victim on the pavement, partially garrotted and *minus* watch, purse, and hat.

It was a common case of cruel assault and robbery by street thieves.

Breathlessly Mary approached the stranger, who lay still and motionless. She had no fear of death—the dead had lain in her arms too recently —“a heavier weight than lead;” and as she looked down on the unfortunate man, she could perceive by the light of a gas-lamp close by that his hair was white and glistening. She thought of her father's silvery hair, and forgetting how this man had so recently scared and annoyed her, while stooping down and calling for help, she endeavoured to loosen his cravat that he might respire more freely.

While she was thus acting the part of a little Samaritan, several passers by gathered around her, and four officers of police came up with a man handcuffed and in their custody; the tall sallow man with the hooked nose.

“I am so glad you have captured this wicked wretch!” said Mary, tremulous with excitement. “Oh, I saw it all happen—a horrible act of cruelty!”

“Ah! this is fortunate; then you fully recognise this person as one of the culprits?” said one who seemed by the difference of his dress to be an Inspector of police.

“Yes; perfectly.”

The prisoner uttered a terrible oath mingled with a threat.

"That is well, ma'am. This fellow, Ben Ginger, *alias* 'the Captain,' is an old offender; but we'll have him finally locked up for this. Your evidence will be necessary, however. What is your name, Miss?" he added doubtfully, while peering into her face, as ladies are not wont to be abroad in the streets of London at that hour afoot, and especially alone.

Mary began to sob, and said—

"My name is Lennox. I shall be so glad if you will direct me; I have lost myself since this afternoon in the streets, and cannot make my way——"

"Where to—home?"

"Home!" she repeated in a strange voice, for she felt that she had no home; and none but the homeless can tell how that little word thrills through the heart. Even he who composed "Sweet Home," the sweetest of our ballads, is said to have died without one, a mendicant in the streets of that great metropolis whose magnitude so terrified our little wanderer.

"You seem respectable; in mourning, too," resumed the Inspector, surveying her with the aid of a bull's-eye held up by one of his men.

"Mourning is a common dodge among this ere lot," said one of the latter, "and respectable gals don't ramble about the streets at this hour, so we'll just take her along with us, and lock her up till morning."

"Unless you can show us your house, and give a proper address, I fear there's nothing else for it," said the Inspector.

"So look lively, little one, and keep up your pecker," said the captured thief, with a fierce grimace; "you're one of ourselves, you know, and as you've taken such a precious interest in me and my doings, you're welcome to a share of my bunk in the lock-up. Any objection, Inspector Tappleton!"

"Silence, fellow!" said the Inspector; "we are wasting time. Disperse this gathering crowd; help this poor man to rise, take him to the nearest surgeon's, and get his name and address. But you must come with us to the station-house, girl, if you are as you say, and, as I suspect, a mere wanderer in the streets."

Mary started back with great horror, and, clasping her hands, exclaimed incoherently—

"Oh, sir, do not take me there—what have I done? Oh, my papa, you are in your grave, and Harry, my brother, lies in his at Chillianwallah, but where will mine be?"

"The dissecting-table first, I hope," said the garrotter, with a bitter grin, while mutterings of commiseration, doubt, and ridicule, were heard among the listeners.

"At Chillianwallah?" said a constable, coming forward, and Mary's quick eye saw the Indian ribbon on his breast. "What was his regiment?"

"The **th Lancers."

"And did you say your name was Lennox?" said the official with increased interest.

"Yes."

"Lor, Miss, I know'd your brother well; I was in his troop, and, more than that, Miss, I was his own servant through all the campaign in Central India; and a kind master he was to me. A Captain Wedderburn of the Fusileers, and I, rolled him in a horserug and buried him with our own hands, the same day he was killed in the charge."

"My good man, I thank you," said Mary, almost choked in tears. "He was my only brother. Are you the John Finnis of whom he used to write?"

"Yes, Miss; the very same."

"I have no time to listen to all this," said the Inspector, impatiently.

"Beg pardon, for one moment," urged the constable. "Did you come from Scotland t'other day by the morning train?"

"Yes; to King's Cross."

"Then I'm sure you are the young lady I told Tom Gubbs, the guard, to take care of."

"I am; and he took me to Mrs. Primer's, near the Strand."

"Oh, sir," said Finnis the constable, turning to the Inspector, "this young lady's respectability is unquestionable. I shall find her in the morn-

ing when wanted; but, in the meantime, how is she to get home?"

"Call a cab, and take her with you," replied the Inspector, while making by gaslight a brief memorandum of Mary's full name and present address (not an aristocratic one) in his notebook; and saying that she would certainly be required in the morning, or next day at latest, he proceeded to take care of the garrotted man.

"Come along with me, Miss Lennox, please," said Finnis the ex-Lancer, conducting her into the next street. "Cab!"

"Here you are; fust cab! But what lark is this? A gal and a blue-bottle," exclaimed a strange and tattered-looking being, who seemed to spring out of the gutter, and placed his hand on the door of a hansom.

"Get in, Miss, please. Norfolk Street, Strand."

"Bah! only a couple o' bobs' worth," said the driver, surlily, as he whipped up his lean Rosinante, and away they went.

Mary felt her heart full of gratitude, and so pleased at her escape, that she would have driven in the hansom with Finnis through the streets at noonday perhaps, without thinking of the incongruity of the situation; but, after a time, it *did* occur to her.

"Oh, Heaven!" she thought, "has it come to this with me, that I am grateful for the coun-

tenance and the protection of people so humble as these? and when my money is gone, what shall then be my fate?"

Her new ally treated her with the utmost deference, and expatiated at great length on the kindness, the bravery, and high spirit of his late captain, her brother; and he was still full of this subject when the hansom drew up at the door of Mrs. Long Primer's house, to the infinite relief in one way, and terror in another, of that little woman, who had a wholesome dread of "the Perlice," as she named them.

A few words rapidly explained all; but Mary had no sooner reached her room than she fainted, and for a few minutes was quite insensible.

She was comparatively safe now; but that episode in the street by night was only the beginning of Mary's most serious sorrows, and with morning came the terror and repugnance of having to appear as a witness against the captured culprit. In her dreams the live-long night had the past and the future haunted her, and if for a few minutes she dropped off to sleep, she awoke with a convulsive start. She saw the struggle, the robbery, the hook-nosed ruffian, and cries for aid rang in her ear, or left her lips mechanically.

Her trunk, with her little all, had never been heard of, so she was compelled to abandon all hope so far as concerned it. The next day

passed, and she heard nothing of the affair of the robbery in which she was the chief, or only witness, so she spent a little time in writing to Lady Wedderburn ; it was so pleasant now amid the black desperation of her situation to write to the mother of Cyril, and to cast herself upon her for protection, telling of her sad disappointment concerning Lady Wetherall, and asking if she would kindly give her another letter of introduction to any friend in London ; and with a sigh of longing, and a prayer of hope, she had the letter posted in the nearest post-office, and her soul went with it back to the Lammermuirs !

There came a kind and motherly answer in due course ; but poor Mary Lennox was not at Norfolk Street to receive it.

Dark horror had closed over her by that time !

CHAPTER XVI.

ALDERMAN FIGSLEY.

THE clamorous fear and sense of extreme mortification at having to figure in a petty local court in some obscure part of London, as a witness in such a cause—her very name to go forth in print too, as connected with it—haunted Mary keenly, till a climax was put to her endurance on the morning of the second day, when Finnis arrived with the announcement that her presence was required before Alderman Figsley at the office in W—— Street, when the prisoner, familiarly known as “Ben Ginger,” would be brought up for a preliminary examination and committal.

A close cab was summoned, and they set out together, Mrs. Primer assuring her that she must keep up her courage, as this petty annoyance would soon be over.

When they arrived, Mary was politely enough handed to a seat within the bar, near a table covered with books and printed papers ; and there she sat with a palpitating heart while the Alder-

man, a fussy, portly, and wealthy city man, with a bald head, a rubicund visage, and several double chins, disposed rapidly of numerous cases and accusations by fines, committals, or remittance to a higher court. The heinous crimes of poverty and sleeping in the open air, were always visited severely ; and a little orphan urchin, whose nightly couch was the iron roller of the neighbouring park, was locked up without mercy.

The court in W—— Street was a dingy looking apartment, the windows of which were placed high in the damp and discoloured walls. It was a metropolitan court, and consequently presided over by an alderman ; all other magistrates are stipendiary—carefully selected barristers—else Mary's case might have been managed differently had she been before one of them.

A gentleman of fashionable appearance, calling himself Mr. Jones Robinson, was brought up for extinguishing and smashing a street lamp in the exuberance of his spirits ; and Mary drew her black veil closer on recognising Everard Home, the Master of Ernescleugh, who after tapping playfully, and perhaps contemptuously, with his cane, on the iron spikes of the dock before him, paid his fine, and departed with the air of one who deemed the affair a joke.

"Call the next case—what is it?" said the magistrate, impatiently, for as none of those

before him possessed any particular interest he was getting a little weary, and proceeded to polish his bald head with a silk handkerchief in irritation till it shone.

“William Trayner—livery servant, your worship, accused of assault in a Betting House,” was the reply; “his master, an officer about to embark for the seat of war, will be ready to pay any fine you may impose.”

And to her astonishment, Mary beheld the impudent looking groom of Ralph Chesters—the same long-bodied, short-legged, and gimlet-eyed individual who had aided and abetted him in the scheme against herself—step into the dock with a remarkably airy and confident aspect, while at the same moment Chesters entered the court, attired in a fashionable morning costume, and certainly looking more bloated and dissipated than ever.

Mary was too thoroughly Scottish by blood and education to be without a tinge of superstition in her character; and to her it seemed ominous of misfortune—a conjunction of three evil stars,—a strange coincidence,—that those three men who had brought her so much mischief at home, should be there, in that London Court, at this unhappy juncture.

Chesters’ quick eye immediately fell upon Mary seated near the Alderman, a remarkable piece of courtesy which roused his curiosity;

but as yet, her veil totally prevented recognition.

The assault in the Betting House was fully proved against Mr. Bill Trayner, who was wont to make up a book on coming events as well as his master, who immediately paid the fine. Trayner touched his fore-lock to the Magistrate, and vanished at once ; but Chesters, inspired by curiosity—and, perhaps, a deeper interest—lingered a little in a corner, to the infinite chagrin of Mary, leisurely sucking the white ivory handle of his riding whip the while.

“ There is but one more case, your worship,” said Inspector Tappleton ; “ the assault upon and robbery of, Mr. Fenchurch, solicitor, by garrotters, of whom we have, unfortunately, but one in custody as yet.”

As he spoke, a pale, cadaverous, and savage looking fellow in very worn habiliments appeared in the dock between two officers, and glanced at the magistrate and all about him with defiance and malevolence. He had been brought from the House of Detention, and was heavily ironed, as the authorities seemed to fear that he was quite capable, unless under powerful restraint, of destroying himself or some one else, as he frequently threatened to do.

He boldly and furiously denied all knowledge of the circumstance of which he was accused, averring that he was in another place at the time.

"We have a competent witness, your worship," said Inspector Tappleton of the 1st Division.

"Stand forward, Mary Lennox, and draw off your glove," said a voice, authoritatively.

Chesters gave an undisguised and almost convulsive start on hearing the name; and still more was he astonished when Mary came forward.

"Lift your veil, please," said the Alderman, with a very curt nod.

Her face was pale as that of death, and her eyes were full of alarm, shame, and a restlessness of expression; the very sweetness of her mouth had departed, and a hard line replaced the curve of her once beautiful upper lip.

"Are you married or single? speak quickly," said he, pausing, pen in hand, after the usual preliminaries.

"Single, sir," she answered faintly.

"No objection to be the other, I suppose," said he, hazarding the attempt at a jest.

"Yes, I guess as she's a rum un' your worship," said a constable, encouraged by this; "for she vears a kind o' vedding ring on the wrong finger."

"Silence!" said the Inspector, severely.

The portly Alderman now turned to Mary, and politely enough required her to relate all she had seen, and to confirm her full recognition

of the prisoner. Her evidence was deemed quite conclusive to warrant the committal of the culprit for trial before a higher court, and he was accordingly removed, partly by force, muttering vengeance against Mary if she ever crossed his path again, as being herself an accomplice.

"Don't be afraid, Miss," whispered Finnis, on seeing how terrified she was; "'taint likely as the streets of London will be troubled by him again."

"Search her pockets!" bellowed Ben Ginger, as he was dragged away. A constable approached her; Mary shrunk back, but instinctively put her hands into the outer pockets of her jacket, and drew forth from one, in utter confusion and bewilderment, a leather portemonnaie, which was found empty of money, but contained the cards of Mr. Fenchurch, to whom it undoubtedly belonged.

"This looks ill, young woman—deuced ill for you," said the Alderman, frowning.

"It may all be a plant, your worship—they've perhaps put it in the young lady's pocket," said Inspector Tappleton.

"Still, why did she not find it there before, and produce it?" was the suspicious question of the magistrate.

Mary's tongue clove to the roof of her mouth; she vainly strove to say that she had never, until then, thought of looking in her

pockets, or on going home that night; she was crushed, terrified, bewildered, and unable to speak, till she faintly implored a glass of water.

After some inquiries concerning Mary, as to where she lived, what friends she possessed and so forth, the magistrate said, coldly—

“I find that your account of yourself is so unsatisfactory, that I must require you to give your personal recognisance that you will appear at the due time to give further evidence against this man.”

Mary stared in utter bewilderment; she failed indeed to understand what he meant, but feeling only that money was somehow required of her, she put her hand to her purse, and then nervously withdrew it. With some irritation of manner, for though obese, he was not blessed with overmuch patience or temper, the Alderman repeated the information that she must give the necessary security for her appearance whenever required.

“Sir, I have not above six pounds in the world—it is impossible; if that sum will do, take it, and keep it; but permit me to go, I entreat of you. I am so sick of this place!” she said imploringly.

“Mr. Fenchurch is very ill, you say, Tapleton?”

“Dangerously, sir—we have here a doctor’s certificate,” replied the Inspector.

"Then, if anything serious befell him, the prisoner will be liable for manslaughter—or worse—a double reason for procuring security to insure the ends of justice."

Turning to Mary, he said, "The discovery of this purse upon you is awkward ; can no one be found who will be bail for you ?"

"None, sir—oh, whom could I ask ?"

"That is your affair ; not mine."

All this time she had studiously kept her back to Chesters ; but the sense of his odious presence, if it oppressed her in one way, gave her a species of false courage in another.

"You positively cannot find bail ?"

"Oh no, sir—no."

"Then I have but one alternative," said Mr. Alderman Figsley, dipping his gold pen in the ink bottle ; "sorry for it, but I must at least commit you to prison till this fellow's trial comes off."

"To prison—to prison !" repeated Mary in a voice of anguish that is indescribable, while she clasped her hands and gazed into the round stolid face and shining gold spectacles of the city Solon with intense fear and entreaty mingled, while on her quivering lips a prayer seemed to hover.

"If I may venture to speak a word, your worship," began Finnis the ex-Lancer, with irrepressible anxiety ; "I served under this young

lady's brother in the war in Central India, and elsewhere under Brigadier——”

“What the deuce has Central India to do with the case!” exclaimed the Alderman, testily, as he looked at his massive repeater, and remembered that he had an appointment in the city; “the girl had no business to be prowling about the streets alone at the hour mentioned; I don’t like that affair of the purse, and I must insure her presence; she will be safer a prisoner than at large. You are a soft-hearted fellow, Finnis, and this is not the first time you have been the dupe of a pretty face and an artful manner. You hear me, sir!”

Whatever was the instance to which the Alderman referred, in which Finnis had been guilty of softness of heart, the rebuke had the effect of completely silencing him, and the good-natured fellow slunk back abashed.

“You have positively no friends in London to whom you can apply?” said Figsley, pausing as he looked doubtfully at the girl’s horror-struck face.

In her despair Mary thought of poor Mrs. Primer. But could she, a total stranger, expect a widow struggling for subsistence by letting a humble lodging-house, to be her surety for some amount—she knew not what! Then she actually thought again of the haughty Lady Ernescleugh; but, as before, shrunk from an appeal to her.

"No—no," muttered Mary; "better let the daughter of Oliver Lennox die unknown in the very gutter, than appeal to any—to any, but God!"

"I have a letter," faltered Mary; "a letter from a lady of rank in Scotland to a friend in London, but found, sir, that she had gone to Paris, and—and——"

"Where is this letter? I cannot open it, of course; but the address may be some clue or guarantee."

Mary searched her pockets in vain; her letter was gone! In fact, she had pulled it forth with her handkerchief, and it was now safely deposited under the left foot of Chesters, who had cleverly twitched it towards him with the lash of his riding whip unseen.

"Oh, fatality! The letter is lost—I have it not, sir!"

"This is all, I fear, some specious pretence; we are too much used to such trickery in London. If you were at all so respectable as you pretend, and as your appearance certainly warrants, you would find no difficulty in getting some humane person to be security for you. Every one has some friend——"

"Save the poor; and God knows how poor am I!" she added, with touching pathos.

"I have no time for all this sentimentalism; you must go to prison," replied the magistrate,

as he proceeded deliberately to fill up the warrant for her committal.

"Oh, Chesters—Captain Chesters," exclaimed Mary, suddenly turning in her dire extremity and fear, and stretching her hands towards him; "will you not speak for me?"

"Whew—what is this?" asked the Alderman, frowning at her over his spectacles, and thoroughly filled with suspicion now.

He had been actually beginning to conceive the idea of making some other arrangement concerning her. But now he rapidly dismissed the thought from his mind, and felt irritated that he had permitted her to impose upon him for a single moment.

"I thought, girl, that you had no friends in London; yet you suddenly recognise one here—here in this very court, and in the master of that disreputable groom, whom I have just permitted to go under a fine for a very unprovoked assault. There must be some collusion here! Captain Chesters, your town address is the Army and Navy Club, I believe?"

"Major Chesters, Mr. Figsley; I am Major Chesters, of the Turkish Contingent."

"Do you know this young person?"

"I know her intimately."

"Can you speak for her in any satisfactory way?"

"On one condition, and I must name it to herself."

He drew near her, and in French whispered something rapidly to Mary, who surveyed him with a sublime expression of scorn and loathing.

"What is all this?" said Alderman Figsley, becoming now seriously angry. It is doubtful whether a knowledge of French was among the number of his accomplishments, but he frowned portentously, and muttered something about "contempt of court."

"Oh, sir," exclaimed Mary, "this gentleman—if I may venture to call him so now—knew my father, knew my family, knew me almost as a child, and he might have the common humanity to speak one gentle word for me here."

"I only know, Miss Lennox, that in your own locality at home, you were spoken of lightly enough latterly," he replied with a malevolent glance.

"Oh, papa! my poor papa!—thank Heaven you know nothing of all this! What have I ever done to you, sir, that you should treat me thus, in a strange place, too, when you might, and ought, as a Christian to befriend me?"

"Bah! your name and mine have been mixed up enough, and oddly enough already, Mary; so it is no use attempting to play genteel comedy or act injured innocence here."

The subtle villany of this speech, in such a time and place, made all present exchange smiles

of intelligence, and caused the magistrate to be less inclined to pity Mary. He was far from being a hard-hearted man in the main, and thought there might—nay must—be more in all this scene than met the eye or ear. So he signed the fatal warrant, and leisurely placed the blotting paper over it. Then he handed it to an officer, saying—

“It is for Tothill-fields Prison ; but, in case of mistake, let her have a separate sleeping cell,” retired at once to an inner room, as if to cut short a matter that had already occupied too much of his valuable time.

“Tothill-fields,” repeated Chesters to himself; “good, I’ll have you yet, my proud little minx ! Bravo ! here’s Ralph Rooke Chesters against the field ! Unless, in despite of the fate that is hurrying her downward, she take some silly qualm of conscience, as it is called, bar accident the race is mine ! How lucky that Trayner fell into that scrape and brought me here. I should have known nothing otherwise of her being in London. Ta, ta,” said he aloud, with all the coolness of practised effrontery, “I am going to soldier again, but in Turkey, my girl, for I am sorry to say that my creditors are much more attached to me and my fortunes than you are, my pretty Mary ; so it is better to have a shy at the Russians abroad, than become a billiard-marker, or a gentleman rider at home. Any

messages for our mutual friend the Fusileer? Shall be happy to take them, I'm sure."

And kissing the tips of his kid gloves, with an ironical bow and a leering smile, for both of which he deserved to have been blown from the mouth of a gun, the heartless *vaurien*, gamester, and spendthrift mounted his horse and rode off to the Lady's Mile, and "to do a bit of park," followed by his groom in accurate livery, while Mary Lennox of Lonewoodlee, in a state more dead than alive, and looking as if transformed to marble, was taken away to the prison in which she was to be detained, in a common dark and grated police van !

CHAPTER XVII.

MEPHISTOPHELES AGAIN.

A PRISONER, and without a crime !

Mary Lennox felt that fate was indeed dealing hardly with her. When the first wild paroxysms of grief and mortification were past, she learned to understand that she should be released and free the moment the robber's trial was over ; but whither was she to turn then ? Could she seek for any employment, however humble, and say that her last abode had been a public prison ? Her purse would be restored to her she had been told ; but how long might its contents avail her, especially when all the wardrobe she possessed was the fast fading suit of black she now wore.

All these reflections, and others, coursed through her mind, causing such pangs of pain in her heart, that each was like a probe of hot steel ?

There was a valuable diamond in Cyril's ring, but the idea of parting with it never occurred to her, or that it possessed other value than accrued

to it in her own estimation, from being his gift to her in a time of vanished happiness.

Three weeks after the scene we have narrated, saw Mary still in a cell of the prison, gazing in listless abstraction, and with eyes that were becoming dull and stony in aspect, from a grated window at the high brick boundary-wall of the place, a barrier to liberty and the external world, defended by two rows of crooked spikes.

The chaplain had been kind, and gave her a few dreary books and pious publications; while the matron, whose occupation rendered her naturally suspicious, and who could not be convinced that Mary was not an evil girl in some way, otherwise she should certainly have friends of some kind, supplied her with work, and urged her to "do a little white seam," that she might have more money by her when set at liberty.

But she had ever one thought which rankled bitterly in her heart, that she was a prisoner, though guiltless of a crime!

Should she ever smile—ever sing again—she who had so often sung with an aching heart? Deadened by the massive walls, the roar of mighty London came to her ears like a drowsy hum, and dreamily she listened to it.

Within every shadow there is a deeper shade. To Mary it seemed strange that she should have been able to undergo so many shocks to her nervous system, so many humiliations to her

proper pride, so many bitter mortifications, so many sorrows and affronts, and not have died ! Yet she was still living, with all the impulses of life strong within her, save its best and brightest one—hope, for that was fading now.

Her lover ! He was a feature of the past ; yet she could not look on his betrothal ring without a strange thrill running through her bosom, while fond memory flew back to many an hour of quiet joy beside the lonely stile and by the old pine wood. Anon she dismissed these regrets as unworthy of her ; but she longed and yearned amid the solitude of her cell, for one caress, one kind word from the poor old man who had so loved and petted her !

“ Never more—never more ! ” she would moan and mutter. Could she but join him ! The attempt would be a crime against her Maker—yea, even the thought thereof, was a sin ; but the dark idea would come to her again and again.

Memories grew strong and keen out of the monotony of her existence. And the most vivid, were of her father, so fond and doting, so passionate and querulous, and yet, withal, ever so gentle and affectionate to her. So, then, would come before her with morbid and painful distinctness the scene of his death-bed, his passing away, and the wistful look, which when once seen is never forgotten—the glance we must all give one day, when the world is receding from us, and

its smallness appears more small than ever. His was a smile of unutterable fondness and sadness, and there came the great change that chilled her heart then, and chilled it now—the pallor of death—the forerunner of eternity and peace.

On whose face would her last smile rest? And who would close her eyes when the hour came?

Times there were when a terror filled her soul lest she might come forth only to fall lower than poverty could make her; for she remembered painfully one or two poor girls whom she had seen brought up before Alderman Figsley. But—no, no, she could only die, and be at rest for ever!

She knew that while she was gazing at the smoke-blackened brick wall or into the paved yard, where not a blade of grass was visible, the leaves would be thick and green in the rustling woods of the Merse; the blossoms of the white and pink hawthorn and of the golden laburnum, must have passed away; but the honey bees would be humming drowsily in the sunshine among the flowers she had planted, and over the beautiful heath-clad hills that looked down on what was once her home. There still, in the breezy and sunny morning, the mavis and merle were singing, and the voice of the cushat-dove would sound in the old coppice, the *lone wood*; but never more for her!

• A pile of odious work for the matron was lying



untouched before her, when she was roused from these dull thoughts by a warder announcing that "a gentleman, with an order from Alderman Figsley, had come to visit her."

She started from her seat with heightening colour; a foreboding of the heart told her who this visitor would too probably be—and Chesters, bowing and smiling, was ushered in. He presented his hand; but Mary drew back, and covered her eyes with her hand and arm, as if to shut out the sight of him.

"That man—that man again! You here, sir?"

"As you see, Miss Lennox; or will you permit me, as an old friend, to call you Mary?"

"Friend!" she exclaimed, with loathing in her half averted face.

He was now attired in a blue undress uniform, elaborately frogged and braided about the breast. He wore a gilded waistbelt, and a sabre with a white ivory hilt, and carried in one hand a scarlet fez with a long blue silk tassel; for he was in the undress of an officer of the Turkish Contingent. His appearance was always that of a gentleman, but there was in his eyes the jaded and dissipated expression habitual to them: and there were certain hard lines about the mouth, at least the angles thereof, that indicated him to be a roué or worse, and a gambler who played at high stakes with honour, fortune, and destiny.

"So, you foolish little girl, it has come to this," said he, surveying the bare walls of the whitewashed cell. "Why would you not permit me to become your security—to speak for you, I mean?"

"Rather would I have died than have accepted from your hands the smallest favour on any terms, and least of all on such as you dared to offer me—the daughter of a gentleman, every way your superior! And how basely done—in French, too, lest the magistrate should overhear or understand you. Begone, sir! What seek you here?" she demanded, while surveying him with intense disgust and drawing herself up the while, with the air of a little tragedy queen, her eyes sparkling with resentment, and her hands clenched with energy. "Why intrude upon me, unasked, unwanted, and so abhorred as you are?"

"This is a cell in a prison," said he mockingly.

"True. But here my privacy is as sacred as if I occupied the saloon of a palace! And I am here—here—a prisoner, without crime!" And her voice died away as she spoke.

After a pause she asked,—

"Is it manly of you to come here and mock me in my misery?"

"I did not come to mock you, Mary."

"Leave me, sir. Whatever be my fate, I am stainless and guiltless."

"Notwithstanding all that, your character will

be utterly gone, and a taint shall be upon you that will cause all to shrink from befriending you. If you seek for work, or aid of any kind, however menial, however humble, can you refer people only to the chaplain or the turnkey of a prison? I should think not! Oh, Mary Lennox, you will starve, or do worse, in the streets of this vast modern Babylon!"

Mary trembled in her soul, for he was speaking her own terrible thoughts; but he was minute in his wish to torture her, and pitiless in his desire to bend her to his wishes.

"There are, of course, houses of refuge for casuals, and the hospitals for those who are ailing; and when the unknown or the unclaimed die there, where do their remains go? To the surgical theatre, where your beauty, which is undeniable, and where the very perfections of your person, may be made a source of speculation, perhaps of banter, for a rabble of young sprigs of anatomy; and thence to a grave, God knows where or how! Avoid the contingencies of a fate so terrible; I entreat you, dearest Mary, to listen to me, and— and——"

"Go with you?"

"Yes." And he drew nearer, as he spoke, earnestly.

"Never," said she, through her clenched teeth, while shrinking back. "Better death—any death, however black and desperate! Oh,

how have I the patience to degrade myself by talking with you on such a subject? But I am becoming familiar with humiliation now and misery too!"

"I could prove a strong friend, Mary."

"Hitherto you have been a dangerous enemy—a veritable fiend."

"As you please, as you please. In this epoch of ours, much as we boast of enlightenment and advancement, passion is as strong, hate as bitter, and Destiny quite as inexorable and pitiless, as ever they were in the dark and middle ages."

Mary cowered and shivered as he spoke; and in the depth of her misery—a misery rendered all the more keen by the girl's extreme sensibility, he surveyed her with exactly such a glance or smile, as one might fancy in the face of Mephistopheles, while watching Goethe's heroine, poor Margaret, when she lay prostrate on the straw in prison, with a piece of brown bread and a pitcher of cold water beside her.

Mary's unconcealed repugnance and aversion for him, kindled at last the rage of this would-be lover; and, in revenge, he adopted an undisguised insolence of tone.

"So you hate me?"

"Say rather that I—despise you!"

"So you wont come with me to the East on any terms? By Jove, I could give you such a pretty gilded kiosk on the shore of the Bosphorus,

where you might see all the gardens of Pera on one side ; Scutari, with its mosques on the other, and all that sort of thing. I daresay that, as senior officer, I could get you out with me in the transport somehow ; and we should do the Mediterranean and the Levant at Her Majesty's expense, and without requiring even a ' John Murray.' Say you'll come, and I shall get you out of this den in a twinkling. I shall soon make it all square with yonder Alderman, who made such a fuss about you. I am in funds, my girl, I can tell you : cleared two thousand odd, by a few strokes at billiards last night, after getting the I O U's of two noble lords—swell friends—by whose aid my leave at home has been somewhat protracted, as I threatened monetary pressure. Say you'll come. I have plenty of gold to pave the way, and wont we be jolly while it lasts ? ' See ; the mountains kiss high heaven'—you know the rest. Ah, you will find it better fun steaming past the isles of the Levant, than moping here or mooning at Lonewoodlee !"

Even his brusque insolence failed to rouse anger in her heart.

" Lonewoodlee—oh, Lonewoodlee !" she repeated, pressing her slender white fingers interlaced upon her sunken eyes and speaking in a soft and agitated voice ; " my father's home ! It is gone, and I have but the memory of it now,

and of all I have lost, to remind me of the words of David," and lifting up her hands and eyes with much of sublime resignation in the expression of her pallid face, she said, "*Dominus dedit, Dominus abstulit, sed nomen Domini benedictum !*"

After a pause,

"Are you mad that you begin jabbering Latin in a place like this?" he asked with an air of astonishment that was really genuine.

"I am not mad, sir, though I might well be; and now I have but once more to entreat—nay to command you, as you are a man, to leave me to my fate and trouble me no more."

"I shall do so—and be assured it will be a sad and degrading one."

"As God pleases."

She turned her back upon him, and with a glance in which rage and baffled desire triumphed over pity, he retired and left her in an almost fainting condition.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TROOPSHIP.

“THE detachment of the Royal Fusileers, under Lieutenant Horace Ramornie, proceeding to join the service companies at the seat of war, will embark on board the *Blenheim* transport at Gravesend, with others, under the command of Major R. R. Chesters of the Turkish Contingent.”

Such was the garrison order, which Horace to his infinite chagrin, perused in a little vellum bound book, handed to him by a corporal, one evening, as he was proceeding to the mess of the provisional battalion. He had no desire whatever to find himself under the special command of such a man as Chesters ; but there was nothing for it save obedience ; and the various anecdotes elicited at table, or recalled to the memory of officers present, confirmed his dislike to the prospect before him, for the mere mention of Chesters' name seemed sufficient. He seemed to be as well known in the service as the goat of the Welsh Fusileers, though not so harmlessly. One remem-

bered "how completely he had done Black of ours in that affair of the spavined mare;" another "how he had been jockeyed by him in a race at the Curragh;" "how he had so rooked Blake of the Rifles at Malta, that the poor fellow had to sell;" how he had abandoned one girl, run off with another and so forth; with many other things that would never figure on his tombstone, or opposite his name in Hart's Army List.

Three days after Horace read the order, and after the interview recorded in the preceding chapter, saw H.M. transport *Blenheim*, with fully three hundred officers and men for various corps in Turkey, under weigh and steaming down the river, greeted by many a cheer from the crews of passing ships.

Horace remembered all that had passed at home between his cousin Cyril Wedderburn and Chesters; and though he had secretly a peculiar detestation for the latter, it would have been alike unwise and unsafe to exhibit it, now that they were to sit at the same table, to meet daily on the same parade, to encounter each other incessantly on the deck or in the saloon during a voyage of so many thousand miles; and more than all now when Chesters bore the local rank of major, and was distinctly his *superior* officer.

All irritation would have to be repressed and all disagreeables avoided, for Horace could not but remember that his commission was his sole

inheritance, and that Chesters would care little "to smash him" if he got an opportunity. So he resolved to shun him as much as possible by seeking the society of other officers, of whom there were some thirty captains and subalterns on board.

Though Chesters hated responsibility of any kind and would very willingly have been second in command to any one on whom the trouble of authority and risk of direction might have devolved, he was not the less disposed to be overbearing in manner, and to attempt to "talk down," all about him, especially at and after the mess, which took place at an earlier hour on board than is usual ashore.

He soon became heated with wine and rather quarrelsome, disputing with Ned Elton, a brother officer of Horace, about the odds on the last Epsom; how *he* should have apportioned the weights, and how shrewdly he had guessed at the winning horse, yet, as if the devil was in it, didn't make a successful book after all, having been "sold" though he knew it not, by his own particular confidant, Trayner, who generally knew the contents of Chesters' betting book as well as his own.

"I'm safe on the Oaks, however," he added with an oath—"backed the winner at long odds there."

"A bad style of fellow this," whispered Elton

to Ramornie ; " we'll have many a case of row and arrest before we see the coast of Bulgaria, unless we combine and put him 'in Coventry.' "

Chesters had on board his faithful rascal Mr. Bill Trayner ; but that amiable individual was at present enjoying his own society in the seclusion of the cable-tier, where, though a civilian, he was in irons for behaving insolently to a young officer of the Rifles, whom he taunted as " a carpet-bag 'cruity," a slang barrack-room phrase for a recruit who joins with a quantity of useless luggage ; and on appealing to his master, the latter only laughed at him, and said—

" The bilboes and bread and water will do you good, Trayner,—you have been getting too fleshy of late."

And Trayner swore secretly that he would be revenged on Chesters for this at a future time.

When idling over their wine and fruit, and while the transport was steaming slowly past the flat but fertile shore of Kent, and the salt marshes of Essex, Chesters with his habitual insolence of spirit and disposition to be obnoxious began to annoy the inoffensive and gentle Horace Ramornie.

" Heard of our friends at Willowdean lately, eh, Ramornie ?" he asked ; " we are neighbours you are aware."

" No," replied the other curtly (though he had

just received a letter from his aunt before embarking), and he turned away.

"Wedderburn is at Varna, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"With yours?"

"Ours."

"You are fond of monosyllables, I think?" said Chesters, with a white gleam in his pale eyes.

Horace gave a haughty smile, and was turning to Elton, the Colonel's nephew, when Chesters resumed his scheme for "trotting him out," as he would have phrased it, and when he spoke the buzz and laughter around the table subsided, for all feared that a scene of some kind would ensue ere long, and felt exceedingly uncomfortable.

"When I was last at the Horse Guards, Ramornie, I heard some talk of a waggon train being formed; and as we have no Belem Rangers, your cousin will be looking for his spurs in that force. He is a pleasant fellow, but a muff, and was an awful griff when he first came out to India."

Horace grew crimson with anger at the triple insolence of this speech; for to any military man the inference to be drawn from the first part of it, was most offensive.

"Major Chesters," said Horace, rising, while a chill seemed to fall on all at the table; "dare you impugn the honour of my cousin Captain Wedderburn of the Royal Fusileers?"

"No—far from it," replied Chesters, coolly, "whatever I may think," he added insolently, but aside. "Come, come Ramornie, take your wine, though it is a little corked, and let us be jolly. You could little imagine where I recently saw his last flame—that girl Lennox."

"Indeed—where?"

"Sent to prison from a London police court, where I had gone to bail out Trayner, who got into a row somewhere; to prison in London, by Jove! though I don't know exactly for what, unless it was involvement in some robbery affair."

"Miss Lennox?" exclaimed Ramornie, with genuine surprise and concern.

"Yes—Miss Lennox as you call her; hope she enjoys the silent and separate system peculiar to the London model prison and so conducive to reflection and all that sort of thing."

Horace was inexpressibly shocked, but hoping that Chesters was telling what was untrue, he disdained to make further inquiries, and once more turned to his friend Elton, seeking to divert the conversation from himself; but Chesters was not to be baffled and began again, while leisurely dropping the ice into his champagne glass.

"And now Ramornie, to change the subject, how is the fair heiress—well and jolly I hope? You fellows—I mean you and the Wedderburns—will surely not let her slip through your hands.

She is worth entering stakes for—a handsome girl, so well weighted, with a pot of money and no end of fun in her. . A noble bird to bag, before the fields are in stubble.”

“Silence, if you please, Major Chesters,” said Horace, whose face from crimson had now become pale with passion, while his voice grew concentrated and low. “I have to request that the name of the lady in question be not uttered here, by your lips at least.”

“That is very quarrelsome wine, surely—try the pale sherry; I have mentioned no name as yet,” said Chesters, laughing.

“Then take heed how you do,” added Horace, with his dark eyes flashing fire. How he cursed in his heart—even he, the quiet and gentle Horace—the rules of discipline, the amenities of society and civilized life, which prevented him from flying at this man’s throat and dashing him under his feet. As for “calling him out,” the idea certainly did occur, only to be dismissed, for duelling had gone out of fashion, and he had not the greatest of Job’s virtues—patience.

His soul was full of love and tenderness for Gwendoleyne—worshipping her as a pure and beautiful spirit, with all a young man’s generous enthusiasm and joy; and thus it revolted him to hear her spoken of jestingly by any man, least of all by one such as Ralph Rooke Chesters!

“I am going on deck, Ramornie,” said Elton,

"try these cigars with me ;" and taking the arm of Horace, he succeeded in drawing him from the cabin to the poop, whither the majority of the party followed, leaving Chesters with one or two more at their wine.

"Ramornie," said young Elton, drawing his friend apart, "I warn you to beware of that fellow of the Turkish Contingent. From the first moment he saw you on parade in the Barrack-yard, he evinced a determination to annoy and fix a quarrel on you. You remember how closely he inspected our fellows in particular, and found so many sham faults, actually bringing four of our best privates to the front, to have them put through their facings as if tipsy, and then made them ground arms as a final snare, that they might topple over. It was an insult to us all. So be wary. I can see that he is an utter scoundrel, and as Oldham says, 'he could outrogue a lawyer,'—aye, even a Scotch one, or a Jew ; but at the same time he is your senior officer, and in all rows a junior invariably is sent to the wall. Besides, old fellow, I think we have had quite enough of that ship champagne."

"You are right, Elton," said Horace ; "he is beneath my attention. But my head still aches with the memory of that champagne breakfast we had at Brompton with the Rifles, before we marched out."

"Clicquot and fun ; eh, Horace ?"

"They are all very well," added a *blasé*-looking officer with sleepy eyes and long fair moustaches; "but when to these you add hazard and *écarté*, as we had them, the breakfast becomes something to remember."

"And repent of; eh, Ponsonby?"

"Yes, decidedly—doocidly so, as I know to my cost."

"Was Chesters there?" asked Elton.

"Of course; d—n him!" was the rejoinder of Ponsonby, who was a 23rd man.

"Well," said Ramornie, thoughtfully, "the Essex shore looks flat and low now; we shall soon be in blue water, and see the last of Old England."

"Not the last, I hope," said Ponsonby, smiling.

"For some among us, certainly, if knocks are going."

"Anyway, thank God, we are off in earnest," said Elton; "I was so sick of Chatham, with its boredom of drills and sham duties: besides, it will be so jolly to knock about the world a little."

"Yes; and better still to knock about the Russians a great deal, eh? ha, ha!" lisped a languid Hussar officer, as he twirled his bandolined moustache and laughed at his own mild joke.

The transport was now clearing the Thames, and rounding the floating light on the sand-bank that runs eastward from the Isle of Grain.

The waters of the Medway opened wide upon

her starboard beam, and as the setting sun shone through the golden haze, the buildings of the dockyard, the tall masts of the war-vessels in the great basin at Sheerness, and the outline of the guardship, came all darkly and minutely forward to the eye.

A red flash and white puff of smoke from the black hull of the guardship caused all the loungers on the poop of the Blenheim to turn towards her.

"The evening gun," suggested one.

"Impossible," said another; "the sun is still high above the Essex marshes."

"What's the row yonder?" asked the Hussar, languidly; "the guardship has hoisted a signal at her main?"

The evening was beautiful; the poop was crowded with officers in their shell jackets, or undress uniform, and the air was redolent of cigars of all kinds; their men grouped amidships were looking at the fast-receding shore; others at the cat-heads, were gazing wistfully seaward, and some at the passing craft, bearing up Thames from every quarter of the globe, and all were merry, heedless, and thoughtless of the future that was before them.

"What the deuce is up?" was now the general exclamation, as the steamer slackened her speed, and drew in shore nearer to the point of Sheerness.

"What is the signal?" asked Ponsonby.

"Red, blue, and yellow—nautical, perhaps; enigmatical, certainly," said the Hussar.

"Some fellow on board has got his swell friends in town to telegraph for him at the last moment, to come back with the pilot-boat, perhaps," suggested Ponsonby.

"Urgent private affairs—that his book on Coutts' is all square; that his uncle is dead, the will all right, and that he'd better return to mamma."

"Hush, gentlemen," said a grave old Captain of the Rifles, who perhaps was thinking of his wife and little ones. "We shall soon learn what is wrong."

"There is nothing wrong, sirs," said the Captain, testily, from the bridge; "but the guardship has signalled that we are to lie to for a boat from the shore; and here it comes, hand over hand," he added, as a man-o'-war gig, with its oars feathered in beautiful and steady regularity, came sheering out from the basin direct for the transport, which lay heaving and plunging slowly on the heavy ground swell.

Meanwhile that distinguished officer Chesters had been left in the cabin alone to "soak over his wine," as he phrased it, for he was constitutionally and systematically a deep drinker. Amid all the quiet insolence and tipsy banter in which he had indulged, no sentiment of regret

or pity for the poor girl whose interests he might have served, but to whom he had wrought so much mischief, and whose terrible sorrow he had witnessed, occurred to the callous and hollow-hearted Chesters. But he had peculiar and regretful thoughts of her, nevertheless.

"Had I possessed but more tact or time, to have waited a little till confinement had broken her spirit and dulled her perceptions; had I pressed her more tenderly perhaps, during that last interview; or had I spoken favourably of her to that old pump of an Alderman, she might have been mine—mine, by this time! Now, descending fast from scale to scale in misery and degradation, her noble qualities, for she has them, wasted; her pure sentiments dulled, her affections blasted, her perils equalled only by her beauty, she may become the prey—the facile prey of *others*!"

And he gnawed his yellow moustache and bit his thin cruel lip at the galling idea. Had he only traduced and repudiated her, to the end that she might become the prize—the prey of some person unknown? Jealousy became a keen pang, but the waters were rolling between them now, and every revolution of the inexorable screw—and now it suddenly occurred to him that the motion thereof had ceased, and he was just about to come on deck and have another bout of banter with Ramornie, when Lieutenant Elton,

who acted as adjutant of the various detachments, placed in his hand a long official letter, which he tore open in haste and surprise.

It was from the Quartermaster-General, informing Major Chesters, that Lieutenant-Colonel Louis De la Fosse of the 34th Regiment, Infantry of the French Line, having come to London on a special mission from Marshal St. Arnaud, would have a free passage on board H.M.S. *Blenheim* to Varna; and it was trusted that as a stranger and officer of the allied army, all courtesy and attention should be shown to him during the voyage.

"The devil! De la Fosse!" muttered Chesters, changing colour. "Where is this fellow, Elton? this Frenchman?"

"He is here," replied Elton, as a very handsome man about forty years of age, with regular features, curly hair, a long dark moustache and closely-shaven chin, in the blue uniform and gold epaulettes of the French Line, with a few orders glittering at his scarlet lapelles, his little kepi in one hand and his sabre in the other, entered the cabin and bowed low to Chesters, who returned the courtesy, but with a coldness and restraint that were as marked as the surprise and hauteur that immediately spread over the face of the other, when his open and pleasant smile passed away, and he recognised the man he looked on.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE VOYAGE.

"COLONEL DE LA FOSSE, I bid you welcome to her Majesty's ship *Blenheim*," said Chesters, presenting his hand, which, however, the Frenchman did not take, but contented himself with another bow and a very perceptible elevation of his black eyebrows. "I have also to congratulate you on promotion since——"

"Since when, monsieur?"

"We last met."

"Ah!" said the other a little contemptuously, "I thank you. I have just been in time to reach your vessel; the telegram left London this forenoon, about the same time I quitted it by rail; and here I am."

"So we are to have the pleasure of voyaging together so far as Varna."

"So far—yes," replied the Frenchman, shrugging his shoulders, and causing the bullion of his epaulettes to glitter, whilst his face said so plainly

that he saw little pleasure in the companionship that Elton laughed behind his forage cap.

"Will you eat anything; the messman will bring you partridge pie and *pâtés de foie gras*."

"No thank you."

"The wine is here," said Chesters; "shall I assist you?"

"Thanks; I shall help myself. What is this? St. Julien!—très bon!" and the Colonel took a bumper of wine, without according a smile or a glance to Chesters, who felt far from comfortable, as several officers had left the deck, all anxious to converse with the stranger, and be attentive to him. But after seeing to his berth on board, and having his baggage arranged by a Fusileer, who was to act as his servant during the voyage, he lit a cigar and went on deck without bestowing the faintest bow on Chesters, who bit his lip, and muttered something under his breath.

The *Blenheim* was under full steam now; the wind was fair for her down channel; her top-sails and topgallant-sails were sheeted home; the Isle of Sheppey was sinking fast upon her star-board quarter, and the bugles having ere this sounded the tattoo, save by the watch under a subaltern officer the main deck was deserted.

The French colonel was of course the centre of attraction, and a group gathered round him.

The stiffness and restraint, even hauteur of manner he exhibited in the cabin, passed away completely now, and he chatted gaily and freely on the chances of the war, and spoke with a Frenchman's hereditary hate of Russia and the Russians, for the Gaul has never forgiven Moscow. He expatiated on the sufferings undergone by the armies at Varna, and denounced as criminal the conduct of our Ministry in waiting only for winter to begin the campaign.

He spoke lightly of his own past military experience, but would seem to have seen some sharp service in Algeria in the regiment of General Bazaine; he had been side by side with Canrobert in the breach at Constantine, and had served as a volunteer with the 3rd Chasseurs à Pied in the terrible conflict at the Pass of Djerma, where the Arabs were totally routed and their principal sheiks captured.

"Monsieur le Major, who commands you," said he during a pause, "has *he* seen much of the world?"

"I should say a deuced deal too much—for my taste at least," replied Ponsonby, caressing his whiskers.

"Ah—but in the way of military service, I mean?"

"A little in India," said Horace Ramornie.

"I don't think you seem to like him much."

"Sacre Dieu! no. I should think not," re-

plied De la Fosse, tipping the ashes off his cigar.

"To me it is like a dream that I have heard of you and him having met in Scotland."

"In Scotland," repeated the Frenchman, who spoke English very fairly; "you are but a youth—from whom did you hear of that?"

"From my uncle, Sir John Wedderburn, of Willowdean."

"What do I hear—you a relation of Sir Wedderburn, who was so very kind to me?"

"I am his nephew."

"Mon Dieu!" The Frenchman shook the hand of Horace with great cordiality, and drew him a little way aside.

"And Madame Wedderburn—how is she?"

"Well—I thank you."

"I was a captain then, at the time you refer to—home after the expedition to Morocco—travelling in Scotland, of which the Walter Scottish novels had made me enthusiastic. (Horace smiled at the compound word.) I met this Monsieur Chesters, who pressed me to have a little shooting in Berwickshire. I went there—no shooting at all; it was all one humbugs! play, play, play: écarté, hazard, vingt-un, and so on, till I was left without a centime, and but for your kind uncle, to whom my case became known, I should never have reached France again, never have seen my regiment, never have been now, as

I am, Colonel of the 34th Infanterie de Ligne; for even my watch and rings I had staked at his table and lost, among them a valuable onyx, that belonged to one of my ancestors, and which I see he has the bad taste now to wear; consequently, I have no particular favour for M. Chesters. And now that we have met again, I would call him out," he added through his clenched teeth, while a fierce gleam came into his black eyes; "yes! and force him to fight me on the first land we see; but then, mal- peste! I know that Marshal St. Arnaud would resent on me severely a quarrel with any British officer at the present juncture; so I must dissemble, if I can, till I find him among that rabble the Turkish Contingent, when I may shoot him, begar! with a safe conscience, under pretended belief that he was a Turk!"

The first few days of the voyage passed pleasantly enough; the weather was fine, and when the few duties incident to a troop-ship, such as the parade of the men in their canvas frocks and of the quarter-guard for bayonet duty, on the poop, forecastle, and scuttle-butt, were over, idling, smoking, single-stick, revolver practice at the passing birds, or at a bottle slung from a yardarm, and too often gambling, became the mode of passing the time.

Gaming is strictly prohibited in transports as in camp or quarters; but the evil example of

Chesters speedily infected the younger officers, who as they all belonged to different corps, and would be separated on landing, had little interest in each other personally ; so if the tedious monotony of the voyage was partially dispelled by the excitement of gaming, they cared nothing for the monetary risk they ran, and kept up a cross-fire of I O U's, that would rather have astonished their parents and guardians ; and were all the more free with these from the knowledge that ere long they must be before the enemy, and a bullet might pay off the heaviest score. Thus every evening, after the mess-table was cleared, cards and dice made their appearance regularly, and large sums were staked and lost or won, to the manifest deterioration of discipline and good-feeling ; and all this was caused solely by Chesters, whose special office and duty it was to have repressed the practice at once, instead of becoming a leader in it : but this cosmopolitan Scot was " a gambler for gain : that foul amalgam of the miser and the knave."

This state of matters continued to increase until the evening after the transport entered the Mediterranean, when a very unpleasant fracas took place.

The weekly parade of all the troops on board in full dress and in heavy marching order had just occurred, and the soldiers had been dismissed to rack their arms and resume their free and easy

canvas frocks, when the Bay of Gibraltar, glittering under a clear and brilliant sunshine opened on the port bow of the *Blenheim*, as she steamed onward between lovely Andalusia on one side, and the black mountains of arid Tetuan on the other, gliding past the shores of Europe and Africa into one of the greatest water-highways of the world.

In outline a couchant lion, starting there to the height of fifteen hundred feet from the pale blue ocean, that seemed to ripple in gold and silver against its base, the Rock of immortal memories, terminated in the ruin known as O'Hara's Tower, on which the British flag was flying in the distance diminished to a speck. The *Blenheim* did not run close in, but steamed steadily onward into the Mediterranean, and as the vast citadel began to lessen on her quarter it seemed to all as if they had seen but a glimpse, and a passing vision it certainly was—of gardens of brilliant green; terraced houses of dazzling whiteness, with sunshaded windows; batteries bristling with uncounted guns, and dotted by redcoats whose bayonets glittered like stars; cliffs honeycombed into galleries and perforated by round holes, through which grim cannon peered, and, below all, the bay full of shipping, where the variegated flags of all the nations of the maritime world were fluttering in the breeze of a pleasant August afternoon.

There were special orders that unless stores were required she was not to touch at Gibraltar, so, to the disappointment of many, the *Blenheim* held on her course. Horace experienced this in particular; but several officers on board had been quartered there before, and cared less about it.

"Were you ever stationed in old Gib?" asked Elton of Ponsonby.

"No; never. And shouldn't care much to be cooped up between the bay and the Spanish lines."

"Old Gib is not without its amusements, and I have twice had a run with the Calpe hounds," said Chesters, who was well up in all kinds of field sports. "The meet always takes place at San Roque, six miles from the Rock on the Andalusian side."

"You could scarcely have it six miles from the Rock on the *other* side," said Colonel De la Fosse, twirling his moustaches.

Chesters frowned, but resumed:

"People don't usually course in the sea, Colonel. The last time I rode yonder, after we had a dose of milk-punch at the nearest posada, the fox broke cover at the end of the Malaga Garden, and away we went powdering along at a rasping pace. We had a devil of a run over the most awful ground in the world—the Stony Road they name it there, and by Jove, it *is* stony

with a vengeance, being a slope at the angle of forty-five degrees, covered with thousands of cart loads of rocks, boulders and loose *débris* that have fallen from the mountain above ; but across it we went with a whoop and a cheer, some eighty riders or more, all in red, for no true born Briton can either hunt or fight comfortably in any other colour ; and if any of the 12th fellows were there, you might be sure to hear them shouting '*Montis Insignia Calpe !*' because that motto is on their colours with the castle and key. I can almost make out the coursing ground from here with my glass, though the old Rock is sinking fast astern. I had I remember a strange bet there, with Bob Riversdale, a staff surgeon——"

"And you won it?" asked De la Fosse drily.

"Yes."

"Aha, begar, I thought so—I'm sorry for Monsieur Bob," said the Frenchman, whose manner made the speaker colour with anger, while Horace turned away wearily, for he was heartily tired of Chesters' everlasting topics, horses and gambling, dice and cards ; so he followed the Frenchman, who proceeded to the taffrail ; there a few officers were leaning over it, smoking and keeping their eyes fixed on the fast receding pillars of Hercules, which were defined in dark outline against the sky, and melting into the

evening sea, which was all aflame with the amber and crimson tints of the setting sun.

A young officer in a shell jacket with bright yellow facings, politely touched his cap, and made way for the French Colonel.

"Thanks, Monsieur,—do not allow me to disturb you," said the latter; "ah—pardon," he added, as he took a button of the other's uniform between his fingers; "you belong to the 34th of the Line—my own Number!"

"Yes, Monsieur le Colonel," said the young Ensign, proudly; "ours is the Cumberland Regiment, and was raised in 1702."

"'Albuhera,' 'Arroya del Molinos,'" continued the Colonel, reading the motto on the button. "I could tell you a good story about your Regiment and mine, when my father, the Marquis De la Fosse, commanded the latter in that very battle of Arroya del Molinos in Spanish Estremadura, in the brave old war of the Peninsula, that we are forgetting all about now.

"In that little village, which is situated in a plain that was then quite covered with wild laurels and mignonette, and at the base of a ridge of rocks that start abruptly up in the form of a crescent, the whole Regiments comprising the division of Marshal Gerard, when getting under arms amid the rain and mist of a dark morning, were suddenly surrounded and attacked

by the troops of Sir Rowland Hill, who had made a forced march for that purpose from Alcuesca. To be brief, they were nearly all taken to a man by your people, and my father fell from his horse severely wounded. The French had formed two squares and begun to retreat, when suddenly there was a shout of—

“ ‘Voilà les baionettes Ecossais!’ and one square was entirely cut off by a Regiment of Highlanders, who dashed at it out of the mist. The other, which was chiefly composed of the 34th of the Line, under the Chef de Bataillon, my father—now sorely wounded and afoot—was surrounded by the British 34th,” and he told me that in the grey light of the breaking day each Regiment simultaneously recognised the other’s *number* on their shakos, and the French officers as they tendered their swords to those of your corps, exclaimed—

“ ‘Voilà, messieurs—nous sommes des frères, nous sommes du trente-quatrième régiment tous deux! Les Anglais se battent toujours avec loyauté, et traitent bien leurs prisonniers!’ ”

“The sword of my father was returned to him by the commander of your regiment, who politely said something about ‘les malheurs de la Guerre,’ and the fighting ended.”

“It is quite true, Monsieur le Colonel,” replied Hunton, the young officer, smiling; “for at the

Head quarters of our regiment, we still possess the brass drums, and the drum-major's staff of the French 34th, and if I ever have, as I hope, the pleasure of presenting you to our mess, you shall see them under more pleasant auspices than the Marquis your father last saw them.* But now that we are allies, are not such memories better forgotten?"

And now we have to record the less agreeable portion of our story, already referred to.

* This military coincidence is a historical fact.

CHAPTER XX.

UN BON COUP D'EPEE.

As the troops on board were divided into three watches, there were always about a hundred men on deck at a time exclusive of the seamen. On this evening, Horace was subaltern of the watch, and as such, was solitary on the poop, while his men, muffled in their grey great coats, trod to and fro on the main deck, or lounged between the guns on each side, for the transport was partially armed.

As the evening deepened into night, the stars came brilliantly out in the blue sky of the Mediterranean; the atmosphere was calm and serene; the wind light, but fair, and the great troopship, with its living freight, glided silently and swiftly on the watery path, with its three great lanterns, green to starboard, crimson to port, and white at the foretop, emitting weird and strange gleams at times on the bellying sails, the lofty spars, and the passing waves.

The time and place were very conducive to

thought and reflection, and undisturbed by the laughter, exclamations and other sounds that issued occasionally from the great cabin, where wine or brandy and water, dice and cards were the order of the evening, Horace Ramornie gave himself up to the solitude of the sea, and with a fragrant havannah in his mouth, leaned over the taffrail, watching the white and phosphorescent sparkle of the vessel's wake, as the water boiled and bubbled in two eddies under each counter, to meet in one around the propelling screw.

Horace had certain unpleasant forebodings that Chesters would yet work him some mischief, in the spirit of his feud with Cyril Wedderburn, and the fear of this grew strong within him, together with a loathing of the man ; for his commission and his honour were the young man's sole inheritance now, and he knew that despite the sword and epaulettes which gave Chesters the rank of field-officer in the Turkish Contingent, he was a reckless desperado ; so this dread conflicted with the solemn thoughts that occurred to him, as they do to most thinking men, while at sea in the silent night, when the clear stars are reflected in the passing waves, and strange phosphorescent lights seem to glide mysteriously under the bosom of the vast and shadowy deep.

And soft and tender memories came of his Gwendoleyne—memories blended with “the per-

fect love that casteth out fear." She loved him well, he knew, though their mutual aunt knew it not, for both were aware of her *wish*; and Horace blushed to himself as he thought of a sentence in a novel which Lady Wedderburn had once read to him rather pointedly, and which was to the effect, "that disproportion of fortune was an insurmountable barrier to married happiness; that the sense of perfect equality in condition was the first requisite of that self-esteem which must be the basis of an affection untrammelled from all unworthy considerations."

If he fell in the coming strife how long would Gwenny sorrow for him? Long, he was assured; but sorrow cannot endure for ever. Time consoled all, and soothed all, even as it avenged all things; and others would come who would teach her to forget him, and perhaps—to love them. Aye, there was the rub, the gall and the bitterness; and his whole soul revolted at the idea that when he was lying forgotten in his foreign grave, amid the festering heap in some battle-trench, another might gather in his arms that Gwenny whose beauty was so sweet and tender, and whose heart as yet, was wholly his own!

Yet he would not have her to pine as one who had no hope on earth. That would indeed be too selfish; so with a sigh, he strove to thrust these thoughts away.

While thinking thus, eight-bells struck, and

Hunton, of the 34th, whose duty it was to relieve him and take the middle-watch, which extends from midnight to eight in the morning, came promptly on deck to his post, while the old watch went below, and a hundred fresh soldiers in their greatcoats and forage caps came thronging up the hatchway.

"You'll scarcely find the cabin so pleasant as the poop," said Hunton significantly, "for Chesters and Co. are at it again."

"I mean only to have a glass of sherry and a devilled biscuit from the messman, and then turn in," replied Ramornie, to whom the long and handsome saloon presented a very exciting scene as he entered it.

By the rules of Her Majesty's Service all lights in the fore part of a troop-ship are extinguished at eight o'clock P.M., save such as there are sentinels posted over; even the lights of the officers aft are put out by ten. The captain of this transport, an old master of the Royal Navy, had retired to his own cabin, leaving particular orders that "the lights were to be doused before the first hour of the middle watch was past;" but by permission of Major Chesters, "the officer commanding," they were kept burning as long as there was a card to be turned, or a dice-box rattled.

Overcome by wine and excitement, some of the juniors had dozed off to sleep on the sofas

and cushioned lockers. Two were singing, and others were arguing noisily as to the place where the troops would probably make their landing against the Russians—if they ever landed at all. Some were offering and booking ridiculous bets, for the evil example of Chesters was painfully prominent now. The wine decanters had passed freely and frequently round, and as a result, the clamour of voices rose at times to a most unseemly and discordant din; but fortunately, laughter and fun were predominant, for most of those present were heedless subalterns, lads fresh from Eton, Sandhurst, or Harrow.

Chesters was seated at a table playing vingt-un with young Elton, whom he had lured or taunted into gambling with him, and whose face, alternately flushed or pale as he won—which was seldom—or lost, which was frequently, presented a strange contrast to that of his bloated adversary, or to the placid aspect of Colonel De la Fosse, who, while watching the turns of the game with an eye expressive of disdain, leant quietly against the foot of the mizen mast, with a half-lit cigar between his fingers, and muttered to Horace as he passed something about "*le régiment de la Calotte*" (i.e., madmen).

Horace had been at sea in troop-ships ere now. In one he had gone round the Cape to India; but never before had he beheld a scene like this at such an hour in any vessel in her Majesty's

Service ; it was so entirely subversive of discipline and good feeling.

"Here comes Ramornie from the deck, looking as usual, cool as a cucumber, rather reprehensively perhaps, too," said Chesters, mockingly ; "will you join us, and have a little mild play, 'to improve the shining hour ?' "

"I would rather be excused, Major. I never gamble," replied Horace.

"Ah, you have no small vices. You, then, Ponsonby ?"

"Play with *you* ?" replied Ponsonby, who had imbibed sufficient wine to make him exceedingly rash, "not if I know it !"

"Why so ?" asked Chesters with knitted brows.

"Can't afford it ; that is why," replied the Welsh Fusileer, coolly.

"You have grown cautious ?"

"No. But you are always so deuced lucky with the honours, and when the ship rolls, do exactly what you please with the kings and aces."

"A home-thrust, egad !" said Elton bitterly, for he had been losing fast.

"I'll have a turn with you, Major," said a little tipsy ensign, stepping up from a sofa.

"I don't bet with boys under age."

"But you play with them, and to some purpose," retorted the lad angrily.

Chesters darted a furious glance at the speaker (who returned it by an unabashed stare), and then he proceeded to sort and shuffle the pack of cards anew, prior to determining the deal.

"Mon ami," whispered Louis De la Fosse to Elton at this juncture; "beware of him you play with. I know him of old; he is one of the luckiest fellows in the world."

"How?"

"He is ever a winner, always cool, always quiet and observant, and seems to possess the eyes of Argus instead of two."

"What is all that whispering about?" asked Chesters, with suspicion.

"You, Monsieur," replied the Colonel, so quietly, that the blotches on the Major's face deepened in colour.

"A knave! the deal is mine," said he. "My transactions with *you*, Colonel De la Fosse, if it is these you refer to, were a trifle compared to my single affair with Prince Galitzin, the Russian Attaché at Paris."

"They were serious enough for me, any way, Monsieur."

"I won eight thousand pounds odd, at a sitting; we played vingt-un, this very game. But then he owned more roubles and Russian peasants than he could well reckon."

Elton was still losing fast, and the exaspera-

tion of his temper, the pallor of his face, his straining eyes and general disorder of aspect, became painfully apparent, while the bead drops of perspiration glittered on his temples.

"You had better abandon vingt-un," said Horace. "The run of luck is against you, my dear fellow; or wont you turn in, the hour is waxing late."

"Early, rather," replied Elton to this advice, which was rashly given, so far as the giver was concerned, for Chesters immediately said in a threatening tone—

"What the devil do you mean, sir, by interfering with us? By what right do you permit yourself to do so?"

"The right accorded by friendship and kindness."

"Attend to your own affairs, sir. You've not had much experience of life, my young friend; but like mild, trashy Cape Madeira, you'll improve by a sea voyage, I hope."

Horace kept his temper by an effort, or felt himself compelled to do so, and turned away towards the rudder-case, recalling the fears he had fancied, and the wise resolutions he had formed on deck to avoid this dangerous man; but a loud laugh elicited, by some remark of the latter, from the tipsy ensign—a remark in which he heard his own name mentioned, drew him again to the table near the mizen mast.

"And you came home with her over land?" he heard Chesters say.

"Yes, by Jove I did," replied the boy.

"She is a girl with a thundering lot of money in Indian stock, bonds, a palace in the Choultry, and the deuce knows all what more. I suppose Ramornie can tell us all about it."

"Of whom are you talking, sir?" asked Horace.

"Wedderburn's cousin—the Madras girl."

"That subject again, Major Chesters?" said Horace, absolutely trembling with passion, for there was a deliberate and languid insolence in the other's tone that maddened him.

"You should not find it an unpleasant one," said Chesters, still mockingly. "A girl worth her weight in gold; in fact, her weight in mohurs and rupees."

"A la belle millionaire!" said De la Fosse, smiling, as if to preserve good humour. "If beauty be the test, parbleu! every girl I saw in England is worth her weight in guineas."

"They say she is to marry Wedderburn of the Royal Fusileers," continued Chesters, resolutely bent on insulting Ramornie. "Ha, ha! but many a fellow will be run to earth ere we return again, and why not Wedderburn among the rest? He may go to Old Scratch with the *down* train, for a hotter place than Varna, and have no return ticket."

"Sir, I appeal to all those present, if this is not a most brutal jest?" exclaimed Horace, now as white with passion as Elton was with his losses.

"This to me, sir?" exclaimed Chesters, starting up. "I am a gentleman——"

"By the courtesy of the turf."

"I am a Major of the Turkish Contingent!"

"Much that is to boast of," replied Horace, whose voice was tremulous with rage and scorn.

"Look you, young fellow," said Chesters, in a bullying tone, "hitherto, so far as you have been concerned, I have been holding my stride——"

"Sir, *I* am a gentleman; neither a jockey, nor a groom, consequently your phraseology——"

"Is obscure, you would say?"

"Yes."

"Then, by Jove, I'll make it plain enough to you. I am your superior officer, and as such I order you under arrest; aye, close arrest in your cabin. Mr. Elton, as acting adjutant, receive Mr. Ramornie's sword. At Malta or Varna he shall figure before a general court martial."

Ramornie, little foreseeing the use to which it would soon be put, handed his sword and belt without a word to Elton, and bestowing on Chesters a glance of supreme disdain, retired to his cabin, but in such a mood of mind as the reader may conceive.

This untoward affair caused a chill, a gloom

to fall on all present, and they formed little groups to whisper over the probable result of it.

"And now to finish our game, Elton," said Chesters, coolly reseating himself. "We have but a few minutes only, ere the lights must positively be put out. Where were we?"

"I scarcely remember," sighed Elton, who had already lost stake after stake, and given I O U's to a considerable amount, for to him, as a younger son, the losses he had sustained were ruinous, and he despaired of retrieving his fortune.

Colonel De la Fosse, who had beheld the scene between Chesters and Ramornie with silent indignation, now proceeded closely to watch the conclusion of the game between the former and Elton; and while humming a French air, he had taken up Ramornie's sword, drawn it from the scabbard, and with apparent curiosity was examining the edge, and more particularly the *point* of it.

As dealer, Chesters turned up a *vingt-un* with wonderful celerity and success on every occasion. And at last poor Elton, pale as death, with blood-shot eyes, trembling hands, and clammy brow, placed his last stake, a very heavy one, upon his *last* chance!

But Chesters might still have a fatal *twenty-one*, and thus rook him completely!

The hand, on a finger of which the latter still

wore the large onyx ring he had the bad taste to win in former days from De la Fosse, was spread out on the table somewhat ostentatiously ; and on this hand, or on the ring, the keen dark eyes of the Frenchman were fixed as if by some strange fascination. On the stone was engraved a gauntlet on a sword's point.

All who were sober stood hushed in silence round them, their eyes fixed alternately on Elton's excited face and the fatal cards which roused such evil passions, when suddenly an exclamation escaped the watchful Frenchman.

"*Imposteur ! Mon Dieu—un imposteur—ah, pitiful carabinade !*" and he dashed the sharp point of Ramornie's sword between the second and third fingers of Chester's outspread hand, which he instantly and instinctively withdrew ; and then was seen by all an ace, which he had concealed beneath it, for purposes of his own—the ace being always reckoned as one or eleven according to the exigencies of the holder's play—pinned to the table by the steel weapon !

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CHAPTER XXI.

UNDER ARREST.

MEANWHILE Horace Ramornie was in his little cabin (nearly one half of which was filled by a 24-pounder), ignorant of the strange event that had transpired in the saloon; and anticipating only the evils, the affront, and shame of a court-martial, before which he knew not in what artful fashion the charge of Chesters might be framed against him; and in which, perhaps, spitefully, and for the mere purpose of annoyance, the name of Gwendoleyne Wedderburn might appear as the cause of quarrel, and this itself might ruin him with her for ever.

Knowing but too well that for the maintenance of discipline, the authorities at the Horse Guards generally supported—even to injustice, seniors against juniors—he passed the hours that remained of the morning in a most unhappy mood, fearing that ruin stared him in the face, and resolving—for he was full of desperate and bitter thoughts—that if he were cashiered, he would

join some regiment as a volunteer, if permitted, and still serve, to perish, if he won not honour, in the war !

What would Sir Edward Elton and the regiment—those Royal Fusileers, of whom he was so proud to be one, and among whom he was so well thought of—say, when they heard of his being placed under arrest, close arrest too, a double degradation, when on his way out to the seat of war, for an unmeaning gambling row (such it *might* be called) with his senior officer ?

Gweny and the Wedderburns too ! His heart grew sick when he thought of her and of them ; the disappointment his good uncle must feel ; the indignation of Lady Wedderburn and Cyril ; and the cold, legal, and reprehensive comments of Robert. So his ideas became a mere tumult, a chaos of rage ; for the catastrophe his fears foreshadowed had come to pass sooner than he expected.

Separated from Ramornie only by a bulkhead or two, Chesters was in his more spacious cabin, in a frame of mind that was still more unenviable ; for he had yet the hollow and conventional feeling of honour, or knew the necessity of affecting to have it, for outward purposes. As to what people at home might say he cared little, for there he was forgotten by all, save his creditors ; but here, in the Allied Army, he would have to face exposure, disgrace, and, too probably, a court-

martial, if not summary dismissal from the Turkish Contingent; for even the singularly recruited ranks of the Bashi Bozooks might decline to receive him.

Deep were the blasphemies against Fate, and bitter the curses against Louis De la Fosse that fell from his lips! He drank brandy and seltzer water as if he had a consuming fire within him; his features, all save the grog-blotches, were pale and livid; his hands trembled and moved by convulsive twitches—all the more so when a message came from the Frenchman, through young Elton.

"Tell him, Monsieur le Lieutenant," said the former to the latter, cuttingly, "that I can neither be bullied nor jockeyed like some of his boy ensigns; and that I will fight with sword or pistol, or both, on the first land we sight, even were it no larger than this table."

"Something must be done," replied the rather bewildered Elton; "but I fear arrest also, if I become the bearer of a challenge. Duelling is fairly put down in our service."

"But not in ours. People cant and talk of steam and telegraphy, of progress and civilization, but the science of human destruction keeps pace with them, for human nature never changes. We shall never be without crime and passion. And tell this man—if he is not what I should blush to call any man who wears an epaulette?—I shall

fight him, if he will come, a *duel à mort*, though I fear that my old comrade, St. Arnaud, would resent such a *fracas*. And yet he does not always keep his own temper under control. *Mon Dieu!* I was close by his side on that terrible morning in the Tuileries, when General Cormeneuse accused him of extracting a valuable document from the portfolio of Napoleon; and before one of us could speak, the sword of St. Arnaud was plunged to the hilt in his heart."

Chesters strove again and again to write an insulting acceptance of the challenge from the Frenchman, but his fingers failed to guide the pen. And when he remembered that, too probably, not an officer on board the troopship would become his messenger or second, he dashed his desk against the cannon in his cabin, with blind and impotent wrath.

A jockey, a gambler, a *roué*, he had never before been so openly and publicly stripped of the character of "gentleman;" and now he knew and felt himself to be exposed, lost, disgraced, perhaps beyond redemption, and all through the means of that quiet, stern, and observant Frenchman, whom he resolved that he would yet shoot like a dog, if he had the opportunity. How he loathed and literally cursed him!

Well, if he escaped dismissal, which he could scarcely hope, he should in future scrupulously

avoid his own countrymen, and fraternize with the Orientals—perhaps turn Turk altogether, like the Croat, Omar Pasha; for this gambling scrape would not, he conceived, injure him much in the estimation of Osmanli officers, whom he knew to be but an indifferent set of fellows, often originally the *azancoglans*, or men who do the meaner offices of the Seraglio, or attendants of the pashas, such as *tiruaktzys* (nail cutters), carpet-spreaders, *chiboukgis* or pipe-bearers, and so forth.

But being literally covered with merited shame, he became seriously ill, and his uninterrupted libations of brandy increased his ailment, so that a few hours saw him in a raging fever and placed on the sick-list.

The next officer in command, a Captain of the Rifle Brigade, ignoring alike his past authority and the whole affair, released Horace from arrest, and restored to him his sword. The incident, however ugly, had a salutary influence among the youngsters. Dread of a court of inquiry still existed; so the gambling in the cabin ceased, and a vast number of bets were cancelled, and I O U's that had been interchanged were, by mutual consent, destroyed, torn to pieces, and sent whirling over to leeward.

To do him justice, amid all the contempt he had for his character, the soldierly Louis De la

Fosse felt some pity on learning that Chesters was so crushed in spirit.

"My own life has not been always *couleur de rose*," said he to Ramornie, as they promenaded on deck one evening, while the little green coloured isle of Pantellaria, with Il Bosco, its volcanic cone, were faintly visible on their weather beam; "it has been cloudy enough at times—such as that when this same Chesters reduced me to the verge of starvation and despair; and when for months I was a prisoner among the Arabs in the mountains of Auress, which look down on the sandy waste of Sahara, and when every morning I had the pleasant anticipation of dislocation of the neck, by having my head twisted one way and my body another, like a pigeon in a poulterer's shop. *Ma foi ! un bon coup d'épée* I have struck many a time, but for you young fellows, the best I ever struck was that with your sword blade through yonder trickster's hidden card !"

Save through the surgeon on board, nothing was known of Chesters, who only began to recover his senses one evening when he could see through the open port-hole near his bed the waves careering past before the pleasant breeze that fanned his throbbing brow, and land visible a few miles off; but he gazed at it dreamily, for what shore it proved he knew little, and cared less.

The ocean was all of a very light blue; but

the bases of the mountains were of a dark indigo tint, while their peaks were tipped with crimson and purple, as they started in outline against a sky of gold and amber, that gradually turned to fiery red as the sun went down behind the land. Then blending tints of opal and crimson began to steal across the sea ; while darkness deepened on the shore of Sicily, for such it was, and the cape—some call it the isle—which terminated near Passaro. The chargers were whinnying on board as they gladly snuffed the land—the Pachynum Promontorium of the classic ages ; but it might have been the coast of Bulgaria or of Baffin's Bay for all that Chesters cared, as he closed his blood-shot eyes, and dozed wearily off in slumber.

When next morning he awoke a little calmer, and looked forth once more, he knew instantly where he was. Around the open port-hole swarmed a flotilla of little boats, full of tawny, black-haired and keen-eyed men and lads, almost in a state of nudity, looking like great monkeys as they clamoured for money to be thrown over, that they might dive for it. He recognised the streets of stairs ascending to the Strada Reale ; the solid batteries rising tier above tier, and bristling with a thousand cannon over the freestone rocks, on which the glittering sea was dashing ; the Cathedral of St. John, where the keys of the Holy Cities hang ; the Castle of St. Elmo ; the

harbour full of shipping, chiefly war vessels and transports, crowded with troops, the boats in hundreds shooting to and fro, full of seamen and marines, food and warlike stores, coals, powder, shot, and cannon. He heard the occasional drum and bugle-call in the garrison, and the tolling of those solemn bells that whilom had rung for mass and prayer in Rhodes; and as Chesters turned wearily in his bed, he knew that the *Blenheim* swung at her moorings in the harbour of Valetta.

A great French line-of-battle ship, the *Ville de Paris*, crowded with Zouaves, lay near her. They were swarming about her decks, and even out upon her booms, laughing, singing, and chattering like marmosets, in their short blue jackets, and baggy red breeches, and ever and anon their long brass trumpets rang shrilly out upon the ambient air.

For all these he had no eyes: he was feverish, and though, in a moral sense, not naturally courageous, at that moment he actually longed for death. He could remember his father, a gallant and irreproachable veteran officer, whose ideas of honour were based on the old military school, when men entered the service, not as a lounge, but for the duration of their lives, and when the standard maxims were, never to give, but never to *take* an insult, and to be ever prompt with your pistol! He could recall this

fine old officer, scarred with many an honourable wound, his breast decorated with the medals he had won in Egypt, at Corunna, and Waterloo, commanding his regiment in yonder citadel of Valetta; and he felt that if the dead are conscious, his father would be regarding him with sorrow, if not with shame!

And shame and rage Chesters felt keenly, but no dread of the future and no regret for a mis-spent past; no thought of reformation for the time to come, and short enough that might be. He was devoid of all religion, yet, strange to say, not entirely destitute of a species of superstition; and in times of danger, was wont to recall with confidence the prediction of a gipsy woman at Yetholm, who, when he crossed her hand with silver, had predicted, "That he should neither be drowned, nor die a violent death—yet that he should not die in a bed, as his father had done."

So he began to gather a little hope. He might survive the present disgrace, and be a Bimbashi or Colonel yet—ay, a Pasha with two tails, or a Brigadier; and thus, while trembling in his heart lest the late affair should recall fully to memory the half-forgotten play-transaction, in which his name was once involved before, compelling him to quit the Queen's service, he schemed, in fancy, out the future.

The saloon of the great ship was empty, voice-

less, and he knew that every officer who was not on duty would be on shore, to see the wonders of Malta, to smoke cigars at the Auberge de Provence, have tiffin with sliced melons and Maltese oranges at Spark's in the Strada San Paoli, and a donkey ride as far as Monte Ben-jemma, or the wood of Boschetto, where the knights of St. John kept their game of old, for he had done all that himself in happier and more innocent days.

Suspense and hope, the heaven and the hell of the systematic gambler, he had endured and triumphed over; but to be pointed at by the finger of scorn, for what he had been discovered to be—he, who had alternately bullied or chaffed and rooked the boy-subs of his detachment—all proved too much, however, for the brain. The cognac was again appealed to in absence of the assistant-surgeon, and again a raging fever seized him.

He became oblivious of everything and everybody now, save his close attendant, Bill Trayner, whom he never failed to recognise, and to anathematize most freely—a circumstance which excited only a smile from that well-trained jockey, who was already looking to the reversion of his effects, and taking the opportunity of dividing the contents of a well-filled purse, with great fairness, between himself and his master with whom he was left in charge, for when the *Blen-*

heim got up her steam for the Archipelago, Chesters was in the Military Hospital at Malta, where we shall gladly leave him to recover at leisure from the results of his own folly and debauchery.

It was generally supposed that he would die, or resign and slip quietly home; so, as if by common consent, the officers on board the troop-ship resolved to commit his story to oblivion.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE BRIDGE OF SIGHS.

ONE more brief glance at home, ere we find ourselves face to face with the disgusto of Varna, and the hostile columns of Russia.

Many, many weeks had passed away; and during these, Mary Lennox knew nothing of what was passing in the outer world. She knew that busy world was there, beyond her prison—"the huge lock which shut her out from it," for during the monotonous hours of the day, and the drearier watches of the night between her intervals of sleep, she heard the hum of the vast multitudes around her—a hum that, though less at midnight than at noon, seemed never to become, even for an instant, still.

She was weary—wearied indeed of life; but felt too strong to hope that death was near her. In the morning she longed for night; and when night came she thanked God that another day of her dull pilgrimage had passed into eternity; and then she prayed for the oblivion of that sleep

"which covereth a man all over like a mantle:" but sleep was not always forgetfulness, for sad dreams of the past and vague terrors for the future haunted her, till, one memorable evening, the chaplain and an official of the prison appeared with the startling tidings that she "was *free*!"

"Free, sir! How?" she asked, doubtfully.

"By the death in prison of the man against whom you were bound to appear. It is fortunate for you," added the chaplain, "as he confessed your perfect innocence."

"Poor wretch! I hope he made his peace with Heaven?"

"Can't say as he did, Miss. You see he died in a hurry," replied the warder.

And so it proved to be the case, that the miserable desperado, Ben Ginger, otherwise known to the public as "the Captain," was soon after found dead in his cell; whether of atrophy of the heart or by some secret agency of his own, the learned coroner and intelligent jury, who viewed or sat over his remains, failed to elicit; but Mary was free.

"You may leave this, Miss Lennox, as soon as you choose," said the chaplain, with a smile of encouragement; "for you the gates of the prison are open at last, and the days of your bondage are over, I am happy to say."

Intolerable as the prison had been to her, she was not without fear of issuing forth once more

into the vast human wilderness around it; yet she knew that the essay must be made, come what might of it, and like one in a dream, she put on her hat and shawl. Her garments were sorely worn now, and from black had turned to a kind of rusty-brown tint. Her purse was restored to her, and walking mechanically, she found herself at the strong iron-barred gates. The chaplain still accompanied her; but with that mistaken acuteness peculiar to some people, both he and the matron had their doubts of Mary; and the diamond ring on her "engaged finger" completed the measure of these.

"Where are you going to-night?" he asked, drily.

"As God may direct me. Would that it were to my father's grave at home," said she, as with trembling hands she tied her worn veil under her chin.

Those little hands were gloveless now, so their extreme whiteness and delicacy caught the observant chaplain's eye.

"Home; it is ever home you pine for," said he, kindly, but reprovably; "why are you for ever looking back?"

"Because, sir, I dare not look *forward*," replied Mary, with a morose gloom of manner all unusual to her.

"Are you then as one who has no hope?" he asked, with folded hands.

"Yes, sir; one who has no hope here, at least,

and her smooth white eyelids and long dark lashes drooped as she spoke.

A trite text or two suited to the occasion—a word of conventional advice were given, the wicket clanged behind her, and they had parted; he to repair to his snug little room, with its comforts and well-filled bookshelves, and Mary to wander through the streets, aimlessly, and in a tumult of terrible thoughts.

It was the month of September now, and darkness soon set in amid the dense and smoky thoroughfares of London.

The girl was in utter desperation and bewilderment, and walked on through the ceaseless throng and past the brilliantly-lighted shops, with the old stunned sensation that the whirl of omnibusses and other vehicles will always impart to those who are, as she was, country bred; it came over her, all the more, perhaps, because latterly she had been secluded so long in utter solitude.

Within her heart there was a sense of desolation that was fast becoming unendurable!

She had vague ideas of once more seeking the abode and advice of kind little Mrs. Long Primer, as the only being she knew in London; and with this view inquired her way towards the Strand; but was fast becoming weary, footsore, and in her agitation, oppressed with an intense thirst, which she knew not where to allay.

Alone, she feared to trust herself by night in a cab, and whither, or in what direction, those strings of gay, swift, and crowded omnibuses went she knew not. The Bank, Pimlico, Piccadilly or Paddington, Cornhill or Islington, conveyed no meaning to her; and so she wandered on, enduring a horrible sensation of combined loneliness, emptiness, and gloom, finding herself at times in densely crowded thoroughfares, and at others in stately streets and squares, where the lights and music that came through the tall and draperied windows, the glimpses of rich dresses, of liveries in marble and pillared vestibules; and where the carriages that rolled up to the doors with flashing lamps and glittering harness, bespoke wealth and luxury, gaiety and splendour.

Lady Wetherall might be in town now; but dared she present herself at that great mansion in Piccadilly in such faded attire, and without her letter, too? The thing was not to be thought of!

And it had come to this at last!

“Homeless, near a thousand homes she stood.”

Mary Lennox, so delicate and tender—so loving and true—so formed and calculated for home and home affections! What a fate to be houseless and shivering in the busy streets of London, where the vast human tide went surg-

ing by, ceaselessly—ceaselessly, as it has done for centuries past, and shall do for centuries yet to come ; its very magnitude appalling her ; though she knew that under happier auspices, and with some protection, she would get used to it in time ; but at present she felt only a desperate longing for rest, for the face of a friend—a yearning for the safe solitude of that home she never more should see ; and she recalled now with vivid distinctness all the terrible things said to her by Chesters, so cruelly and so artfully, of what her fate in life, and even after death, might be, if she died there friendless and unknown.

It was night in London now, but the pulses of the mighty city were throbbing still. In some streets the roll of carriages and the echo of hurrying feet had passed away ; but in the main arteries of the modern Babylon the full flood of life was flowing strongly as ever. Night or day seemed to make little difference in them.

Thus as Mary wandered aimlessly on, the strange combinations of extreme light and dense darkness, with the peculiar aspect that buildings and certain objects assume by night, all served to bewilder her more, and she remembered with growing terror the episodes of the last and only night she had ever been thus adrift in the streets at such an hour before.

To add to her extreme misery, rain began to

fall, and came down with a heavy, steady, and apparently ceaseless determination. She was without cloak or umbrella, and was often compelled to take shelter in doorways and chilly passages, from which she was driven by men accosting her in terms of mock gallantry, or by policemen flashing their lanterns suspiciously into her eyes; for she had a most rustic fear of those to whom she ought to have appealed for advice and protection.

But all the little courage she ever possessed was gone now, and the poor girl, bred and reared as she had been, was as a child lost or astray in the streets of London.

The rain was still falling fast, and gusts of wind began to sweep the drenched thoroughfares and to ripple up the puddles and gorged gutters that reflected the gaslights. The atmosphere became murky as the smoke and soot of the countless chimneys were forced downwards by its density. Mary's clothing was wet and sodden now; but in the terror and disorder of her mind, she was scarcely sensible of discomfort, for a man of suspicious aspect had been pertinaciously following her, and to escape him she ran onward till suddenly she found herself in an open space upon a great bridge, the double lamps of which were reflected in the wide river below.

It was the Thames, with all its bordering streets of stores and wharves, and its gathered

fleets moored side by side, packed and densely, and yet so orderly.

Thousands of lights were gleaming across the murky bosom of the river, and through the open balustrade Mary looked at its current wistfully, thinking, as so many have thought, while lingering on that bridge of sighs, that there was peace—there an escape from all misery and sorrow.

She looked round her with a haggard eye: in one place rose a square dark mass from out of the general obscurity; in another a vast dark shadowy dome, that seemed to shimmer amid the dusky haze. One was the Tower, the other St. Paul's; and once more, sighing heavily, she bent her gaze on the turbid water.

It flowed steadily, swiftly, and darkly onward, that mighty river—onward to the distant sea—but far down below her. Strange white things seemed to shine there in a lambent or phosphorescent light amid its rippling current. These objects made her shudder for a time and recoil. Then she looked at them steadily—it might be sternly. They were, she knew, only pieces of rag or rope, old hats, sailcloth, straw, or dead animals—and—"to be found drowned," amid all these!

"Oh, no—oh, no! God forgive me and guide me!" cried the girl, wildly. "Let me not think of *that*."

She cast her eyes upwards as she prayed ; but no star caught her imploring eyes, and the fast falling rain plashed heavily on her pallid face and sodden tresses.

She remembered her father as he lay dead in the old wainscoted room at Lonewoodlee, calm, peaceful, and triumphant over the world and all its ills. But his was a death so different from what such as *this* would be.

"Now then, young 'ooman, wot air you hup to?" said a voice, sharply, in her ear, startling her like a galvanic shock ; and a well-whiskered guardian of the night, in his felt helmet and dripping oilskin cape, confronted her.

"I am doing nothing, sir," she faltered, and shrunk from him.

"Nothink ! Then you'd better come along with me. Prison, I think, is the place for such as you."

"Prison !"

She uttered a wild despairing cry, and throwing herself over the balustrade, sank beneath the still, black current of the stream below !

The startled constable looked over, and as he sprang his rattle, saw something like a little hat and veil floating downward on the surface, but nothing more.

All seemed over !

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE VALE OF ALADYN.

By the time that Horace Ramornie with his detachment of the Fusileers reached Varna, and after a six hours' march, joined the headquarters of his regiment, which was then encamped in the green and beautiful Vale of Aladyn, the magnificent army which had left the shores of Britain so full of hope, so high in ardour and spirit, by the gross mismanagement, the vacillation, or something worse, on the part of the Home Government, had lain inactive and been literally decimated by disease, during the breathless months of a hot Bulgarian summer, and deliberately kept waiting for the approach of the Russian winter with its icy terrors, of which the French army at least might certainly have had a traditional memory and wholesome fear.

Cholera had cut our men off by thousands, and their graves lay thickly all over the slopes in the Vale of Aladyn, where the Russians had buried more than seven thousand of its victims a short

time before ; hence it was not inaptly termed by the Bulgarian peasantry the Valley of the Plague.

The 7th, the Welsh Fusileers, the Connaught Rangers, and all the other Infantry had suffered severely, the Highlanders perhaps excepted ; the peculiarity of the Celtic costume, by the warmth it affords round the loins, having proved an admirable protection, which saved many a life in their ranks. Two of our cavalry regiments were reduced to skeletons, and about two hundred and fifty sabres formed the average muster of the other corps. So severe was the pest that many men died and were buried within five hours of their being attacked ; and now stern doubt and louring discontent became visible in the faces of the survivors. " Though no act unbecoming British soldiers was committed—though no breach of discipline could be charged, it was impossible to refrain from discontent. Murmurs, not loud but deep, made themselves heard. No man there but burned to meet the enemy. The entire army was prepared cheerfully to face death in the service of the country to which it had sworn allegiance ; but to remain in inactivity, exposed to pestilence, which struck down its victims as surely and nearly as speedily as the rifle-bullet, beneath a burning sun, with no power of resistance and no possibility of evasion, was a fate which might quell the stoutest courage, and raise discontent in the most loyal bosom."

The French army had come to Varna by marching over the great mountain barrier of Turkey, the Balkan; our fleet the while had been seeking in vain to lure that of Russia from under the gun batteries of Sebastopol. The Turkish army had been carrying all before it on the left bank of the Danube; and at Citate and Oltenitza had actually routed and covered the Russian armies with disgrace: but the last days of August still saw our army lingering hopelessly in Bulgaria, while the Russian forces whom they were ultimately to oppose were gathering fast in the land of the Tartars.

Horace shared the cool bell-tent of Cyril in the camp, and on the forenoon of his arrival, while lying on the pleasant sward which formed its floor, enjoying cigars and bitter beer, with belts off and coats open, and when looking forth on the scenery, who could imagine that death was hovering so near, and that more than ten thousand graves lay around them in that smiling valley!

On one side of the camp lay a beautiful lake, and on the other the ground rose high and was covered with varied foliage, over which storks were always flying in long lines. And there too were eagles, vultures, and kites, soaring in mid-air, on the outlook for dead horses, or, it might be, a camp follower who had perished in a lonely place, and lay blackening in the deso-

late glare of the sun, covered with flies, with dim glazed orbs and open jaws.

Near Cyril's tent were the ruins of a kiosk or country-house which the Russians had destroyed ; but its arabesque white marble fountain still remained in the centre of a beautiful garden, where the great Persian rose-trees yet loaded the air with fragrance ; where the foliage of the green-gage, the apricot, the apple, and the purple plum, waved pleasantly in the soft wind ; and the beautiful orioles, all yellow and green, the gaudy woodpecker, the blackbird, and the thrush, darted after the flies at times in veritable coveys, and sung sweetly in the shadow.

A group of soldiers in fatigue dress, filling their camp-kettles, canteens, and horse-buckets, or washing their linen, might always be seen about this fountain. These visitors had long since "looted" the garden of its golden-coloured melons and great scarlet pumpkins ; the Egyptian palm, the Indian fig-tree, the gorgeous aloe, and the solemn towering cypress, still grew side by side, though the billhook of the forager had abstracted many a branch to feed the camp-fires ; and had the French been near, not a twig had been left.

Now the allied forces, some eighty thousand strong, were under canvas over the whole vast plain which extends from Aladyn to Varna.

Horace found Cyril looking pale and changed,

for he had undergone a touch of the pest, and he was bearded to an extent that would have astonished the folks at home, whom he had never informed of his illness, as Dr. Riversdale of the staff had "pulled him through it."

"If we don't take the field soon," said he, "the Russians will find but few to fight with. The army, though recruited fast, is rotting away, Horace, literally, and just as our army rotted at Walcheren in 1809, when thirty-five thousand entries were made in the fever hospitals; so you see that in forty-seven years Britain has learned nothing in the art of war! But how fresh you fellows look just from home, in your new uniforms and bright epaulettes, as if you had just stepped from band-boxes. By Jove! you do form a contrast to those who have been under canvas here so long."

Cyril had, of course, overwhelmed Horace with questions about all who were at home; and the latter had related, in confidence, the affair with Chesters in the transport. It, however, excited no surprise, as Cyril knew the worthy's character well; but the mention he had made of Mary Lennox's name stung, grieved, and bewildered him.

In prison! The story seemed mere malevolence, and altogether incredible! How could it come to pass?

While they were speaking, the same Drum-Major who had been wont to act as regimental postman at Chatham—ay, even in Candahar

and many other places—appeared at the tent-door, coolly as usual, with letters for both, the mails having come on in the *Blenheim* from Malta. Each tore his missive open in haste, and became absorbed in its contents; for a letter there was as a voice from home, and the hearts of both were instantly far away from the tented vale of Aladyn, among the green braes of the Merse and Lauderdale. Cyril's was from his mother, to whom he was tenderly attached. That to Horace was from Gwenny.

“For a reason, of which I may tell you at a future time,” Lady Wedderburn mentioned among other matters, “we have employed Chesters’ old gatekeeper, Tony Heron, in the stableyard, where, by-the-by, the long-projected new wing and clock-tower are progressing. Robert is busy with his studies, and will come out for the English Temple. Your father thinks that as he is not brilliant he might shine amid the aspiring mediocrity of the Scottish bar (where there is such utter poverty of position and of talent); but in London, we fear, that he will never *be heard of at all!* The Reverend Gideon M’Guffog, not content with ‘the flesh pots’ he enjoys, is raising an action, chiefly against us, for an augmentation of his stipend, through Grubb and Wylie, the writers (or wretches rather), who, like too many Scotch legal desperadoes, are ready to do anything for cash or a

case. As your regiment does not wear the kilt, Dr. Squills urges that you should wear a belt as a safe precaution against that cholera which seems so terrible at Varna ; and Gervase Asloane says he has in the cellar some fine old Glenlivet, which would be a better protection still, had we but the means of sending it to you."

Other things followed, of as little importance as these, but there came one remark which found an echo in Cyril's heart.

"That foolish old man at Lonewoodlee is no more, as Horace, perhaps, by this time may have told you, and his proud, but penniless, daughter has left this part of the country for ever."

Mary's face, her sad, earnest eyes, her last words, and her helplessness, all came painfully before him. Dead—old Oliver Lennox dead ! Cyril in imagination saw all the grim details of the last scene, with poor Mary alone—so terribly alone—in that old rambling and gloomy Tower. Had his mother been—as he implored her to be—kind to that orphan girl whom he had loved even as his own soul ? The coldness of her letter gave him slender hope of that. Who, then, had befriended, who aided her ? Chesters ?

He writhed at this thought, and though he had never ceased to love her, but false as he deemed her, had sworn never to see her more, the interest he felt in Mary's fate would never die.

The cousins tacitly, and with one accord,

exchanged letters, and Cyril, from the tenor of Gwenny's, guessed at once how matters stood now, and said—

“Bravo, Master Horace! So you have not been idle in my absence? But I congratulate you, old fellow, for Gwenny, wealth apart, is a girl among ten thousand!”

Horace blushed with pleasure, and replied, with a laugh—

“For Heaven's sake, Cyril, don't tell Lady Wedderburn that we have committed the enormity of falling in love. You know what her *wish* is, so far as you are concerned?”

But Cyril did not answer, for another pang was inflicted on him by a passage in Gwenny's letter to Horace, and it almost seemed to corroborate the remark of Chesters in the troop-ship.

“There has been some talk among us from time to time of a trip eastward in the Ernescleugh's yacht, so don't be surprised if we should see the Russians before you do. I should like to get a Turkish husband for Zillah, my ayah (the men here wont look at her), and I don't think that Miss Flora M'Caw, at her mature years, would have much objection to a Muscovite, even if his name were like three sneezes with *off* or *iski* at the end of them. The orphan girl, Miss Lennox—perhaps you may remember, dearest Horace, it was she of whom such unpleasant things were said by the Ernescleughs—was

visited by Aunt Wedderburn and me after her father's death, and before she went to London. Aunt gave her a most kind letter to the Wetheralls in Piccadilly, and another was sent to her address somewhere near the Strand; but it was returned by the post-office people, with the information that she could not be found in London—had disappeared, in fact."

Disappeared, and in London!

Cyril grew ghastly pale as he read those words, which seemed to burn themselves into his heart, and in a gust of jealous bitterness, he connected this disappearance still with Chesters. He started up, shouted for his servant, and ordering horses, added, suddenly and impatiently—

"You have reported yourself to Sir Edward, the Colonel?"

"Of course, Cyril."

"Well, come Horace, there is no parade this evening; all hands are turned to pound green coffee. Let us ride into Varna and have some tiffin, such as it is, at the Military Café. Anything to kill time and thought, till we can kill the Russians! Ned Elton, Probyn, and ever so many more of our fellows will be there by this time, for it is the only place in this dreary hole where any fun is going."

Horace agreed, and a few minutes after saw them mounted and off.

CHAPTER XXIV.

VARNA.

"AND so you and Gwenny are engaged? By Jove! Don't wonder at it! She is a most attractive girl; and there are worse-looking fellows in the service than you, Horace. But I've not been lucky myself lately in this game of love-making. And you should hear old Conyers Singleton of ours tell the story of the girl he left behind him. It is quite a warning," said Cyril, as they trotted towards the line of advanced sentinels posted round the British camp.

"Going to Varna?" asked Captain Joyce, of the Fusileers, whose guard tent was in that quarter.

"Yes. What is the parole?"

"'Bomarsund.' Countersign, 'Baltic.'"

"Thanks. That Zouave heard you?"

"Perhaps; but it can't matter much. He is a captain, I presume?"

Had Horace not been full of Gwenny's letter, and had he not found ample occupation in repeating to himself certain pleasant passages thereof, he must have been aware that there was a forced or spasmodic gaiety in the manner of Cyril Wedderburn that was not real, for he tugged at his moustache nervously, and viciously switched at the flies which buzzed about his horse's ears.

Troops of every kind ; Lancers, with gay bannerets ; Hussars, with their glittering dolmans ; Carbineers, with brass helmets and slung carbines ; Artillery, in dark blue ; and Infantry, in red, covered all the plain. Our Household Brigade of Guards, in their bright scarlet coats, with large white epaulettes and bearskins ; the Highlanders, who were in the same division, in their varied tartans, with their sturdy bare legs and tall-plumed bonnets, exciting the wonder of the starved-looking little Arabs of the Egyptian Contingent. There, too, were the Rifles, in their sombre green uniform, which looks almost black at a distance.

All the bustle of preparing food went forward at hundreds of impromptu fires, by soldiers in their shirt-sleeves ; and the sound of chopping wood was heard on every hand, while the sun of the afternoon blazed hot in their fires from the unclouded Bulgarian sky. Fatigue parties went to and fro, laden with bundles of sticks for the

cooks, or corn or swathes of grass for the horses ; and songs and merriment came at times from the tents where the soldiers lay smoking on the sward. But the camp had its darker pictures.

Here and there a ghastly and attenuated sick man might be seen carried on a stretcher to the hospital tents ; and, ere long, the same stretcher would be borne in another direction, with some victim of the Fever King, to be cast into the graves which honeycombed the low range of hills that overlook the Vale of Aladyn, or it might be to yonder " City of the Dead," in the plain, where the solemn rows of giant cypresses stand like guardians round the tombs of " the Faithful."

Beyond the British lay the French camp, with all its gaily-clad, untidy, but somewhat purpose-looking little soldiery. The Infantry of the Line, in long blue tunics, with scarlet epaulettes, and brass eagles on their tiny shakos ; the splendid Cavalry and Artillery of the Imperial Guard ; the Chasseurs à Pied ; the Tirailleurs Algériens, dressed like Arabs, but in light blue ; and the active Zouaves, in their (to us) well-known uniform, which excited great surprise and speculation among the stolid Turks and the Bulgarians who swarmed about the camps in great numbers, clad in jackets of undyed wool, wide white trousers, girt with sashes of silk, caps of brown sheep-

skin, and sandals of hide ; and who failed to comprehend how Christians should be going to battle wearing the turban of Mohammed ; for the poor Bulgarians loathe the Turks, whose slaves they are ; and as such, dare not carry a knife, while all the former, down to the lowest *hamal* (or porter) go armed to the teeth, with pistols, sabre, and yataghan.

Amid all its splendour and order of military array, this camp, like our own, had also its dark features ; the sick and dead were hourly borne through it ; and there too were the intoxicated, courting disease and death, as they lay by the waysides, in ditches or kennels, stupefied with raki or peach-brandy, their faces blistering in the sunshine, and covered by clouds of odious flies. Others, despite all warnings, might be seen gorging themselves with scarlet pumpkins, cucumbers, gages and plums which the acquisitive Greeks offered for sale ; and the Turks of Omar Pasha were nearly as reckless, for they were always eating of the perilous green fruit, when not engaged in smoking, praying, or covertly reviling " the Christian dogs," who had to fight their battles.

As Wedderburn and Horace were passing a mass of Araba carts, all drawn up wheel to wheel, there darted from under them a long snake of dark green colour mottled with white, and having bright protuberant eyes that flashed like carbuncles. As

the reptile came forward, writhing, wriggling, and almost dancing on its tail, Cyril's horse reared back upon its haunches; but a Turkish *Yazboshi*, or captain of cavalry, who was riding by, drew a long brass pistol from his belt, and with singular adroitness shot it dead; and with a pleasant smile and a low salaam rode on. Once or twice the reptile quivered all its length in the dust, and then lay still.

"Ma foi, mes camarades, but that was well done!" said a voice, and they found themselves joined by the same Captain of Zouaves whom they had seen near Joyce's guard-tent. He was now mounted on a stout little Tartar horse and seemed to have made a *détour* round the French lines, instead of coming *through* them. The cousins scarcely noted the circumstance then, but subsequent events made them remember it. "Going into Varna, Messieurs?" he asked, reining in beside them.

"Yes," replied Cyril.

"A horrid place—dull as a vast catacomb; even the French can scarcely make it lively. Any word yet of when the troops are like to take the field, or for what point?"

"I have heard nothing yet, Monsieur," said Cyril, with some reserve, as the manner of the questioner seemed abrupt and authoritative.

"Your cavalry force is dwindling fast," re-

sumed the Zouave. "Why, diable! all your regiments put together would barely make *one* efficient Russian corps of four squadrons," he added, with a mocking laugh.

"I don't understand this Captain of Zouaves," said Cyril, in a low voice: "he spends his whole time in our camp, and seems to have fallen in love with perfidious Albion. What can his object be?"

"Are you sure that he *is* a Captain of Zouaves?" asked Horace.

"I have no reason to doubt it—but hush; he may understand English."

It might have been some peculiarity of his dress which made Horace think what he said, for the Zouave had features that were more finely cut than usually appertain to Frenchmen. His eyes were black, glittering, and closely set together; his nose was somewhat hooked and a fierce moustache stuck sharply out on each side of it; but his hair, which was dark as a raven's wing, was shorn close to the scalp.

"Sang dieu!" he exclaimed, as if he had penetrated their thoughts and doubts, "but I am tired of this work. Ugh! when we pound the green beans here, between two friable stones, which add dust in plenty to the condiment, I think of the fragrant coffee I used to get at home, and the little pats of sweet butter on a honey-cake, or on a cool green ivy-leaf—the

breakfast of my schoolboy days, at home in pleasant Gascony. I have been a soldier for twenty years ; but I have never forgotten those days."

"He is a Gascon—ah, that accounts for his peculiar accent," said Horace.

"I am not much of a gourmand," resumed the Captain of Zouaves. "In Africa, I have often dined on a slice from an old trooper—a horse I mean ; but still I have a predilection for *fricassées*, and *fricandeaux et galettes*, which mean *collops Ecossais*, or thin cakes (though the Scotch stole all their cooking from us, in the days of the old alliance), and I doat on broiled chicken and cream-tarts, such as I used to get from my old mother in Gascony, before I betook me to the rough-and-ready trade of soldiering."

"And now, Horace," said Cyril, whom the Frenchman's empty chatter bored, "behold our thriving city of Varna!"

It was a dreary looking place, and rose from a bank of white sand that stretched far along the flat Bulgarian shore.

Imagine a low and half-ruined wall, a mile in length, broken and battered as the shot of the Scoto-Russian Alexis Greig had left it in 1828, but all loopholed and painted pure white. Before it lies a ditch, over which a number of 68-pounder guns are pointed. Above it rise the round

leaden domes of four mosques, with their tall, white, slender minarets, encircled by wooden galleries; the solitary campanile of the Greek church, and round these a little sea of dingy red-tiled roofs, and one may picture that Varna on which so many of our soldiers looked their last, and before which Ladislaus of Lithuania and Poland perished in a futile attempt to drive the stupid and brutal Osmanlees out of Christendom.

Prior to the arrival of our troops, its filthy streets had been deserted and silent as the grave. Save when a wild dog—the unclean and forbidden animal of the Prophet—panting with out-lolled tongue on a heap of decayed melons or festering offal, uttered a melancholy howl; when a stork, with flapping wings, came swooping down on the eaves of a dilapidated house, and loosened a tile or two, to fall with a crash; or when a bare-legged *saka* (a water carrier), with his brown feet in low slippers, and his greasy buckets slung from a shoulder-strap, shambled along the narrow and tortuous, yet sunbaked, thoroughfares, no sound was ever heard there.

But now French and British soldiers filled every street and alley with noise and bustle; the bazaars were crowded by Zouaves chattering like magpies; by Rifles and Guardsmen; by grave and observant Scottish Highlanders in search of food, *soochook* sausages, and kabobs, or little articles of finery for wives and sweet-

hearts far away at home ; by quartermasters and sutlers, seeking corn and flour, beef and mutton, Greek wine and peach-brandy ; in short, everything eatable and drinkable. Drums were beaten, bugles sounded incessantly, and incessant too was the marching to and fro of guards, escorts, pickets, and fatigue parties in their canvas frocks. Tumbrils, limbers, cannon and tents, encumbered the five arched gates ; war-ships, transports, and pestilent looking little gunboats, crowded all its once empty harbour. The black kites and mangy pariah dogs were alike scared from its streets and market place. The lazy and blasé Turkish householder secluded himself in his *divan haneé*, or zenanah if he had one ; and hourly held up his hands, or stuck his fingers in his ears, at every fresh wonder, for to him it seemed that the end of the world was nigh, for the sons of Anak, the children of Perdition and the Devil himself, had all possessed the city together !

French names were actually painted up at the street corners, and to crown all, an old deserted caravansera had been taken possession of, *sans permission*, by a speculative Parisian *restaurateur*, who papered, painted, and furbished it up gaily, and hung out an immense sign-board, on which an artistic Corporal of Zouaves had painted the French eagle, with the words, "*Le Restaurant de l'Armée d'Orient, pour Messieurs les Officiers et*

Sous-Officiers ;'' and under this sign-board Wedderburn and Horace Ramornie dismounted, gave their nags, with a few piastres, to two half-naked *hamals* to lead about, and then entered the café.

END OF VOL. II.

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